

Hearts and Faces

JOHN MURRAY GIBBON



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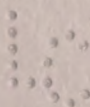
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HEARTS AND FACES

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BY JOHN MURRAY GIBBON



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TO
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HEARTS AND FACES

CHAPTER I

MACGILLIVRAY'S COURT

THE Professor began by calling over his humdrum roll-call in the usual alphabetical order.

"George Grange?"

"Adsum."

"Adam Grant?"

No answer. Then from somewhere:

"Abest."

"Adam Grant, Craigellachie?"

"What a mouthfu'!" from the back of the class-room.

A Celtic giant had hitherto intervened between George Grange and the rest of his bench. The giant's absence on this occasion showed this Adam Grant, of Craigellachie, a country lad, all sunburn and elbows over the desk in front of him. As he took down his notes of the lecture, Adam's lips worked fantastically up and down.

At the end of the eighties, one did not need introductions at King's College, Aberdeen. During the daily fights between the Bajans—as the first-year students were called—and the second-year Semis, Adam Grant and George Grange, both fresh to college, became brothers in affliction, captives together, and bumped fraternally as they were lifted along and "passed up," according to the student custom, from desk to desk in the enemy's class-room. George stopped the flow of blood from Adam's nose, and Adam pinned up George's tattered college gown.

"If ye'll come to my digs, I'll get ye sewn up, and maybe then we can dae a bit Euripides thegither," said Adam that day, as they escaped from a particularly vigorous mishandling.

Agreed, and at midday the two stalked stolidly together up the Spital Brae.

They were rough raw lads in those days at King's College. Your Englishman might say that they should still have been at school and that they were not ripe for student freedom. Perhaps they were a thought unbridled, but the stern dour face of poverty kept most of them upon the narrow path. Their arrogant youth worked itself out in horseplay and hard work. Determination to get on was the spirit of the most of them. Overhead the beautiful spider crown of King's ever reminded them of the great past, of the men who had gone out from the North to leave their mark upon the world: philosophers and men of action, teachers and preachers and pioneers and governors throughout the Empire. They tramped each morning to their lectures fiery with hope, and red-hot with ambition they returned to read at home.

"Ye'll no be wantin' dinner, I'm thinkin'," said Adam after a while, "for we've naethin' to offer. We jist hae parritch the morn, an' a wee bite fish at nicht."

"Fine for me," answered George. "We'll have of Helicon our fill."

As they entered the street known as the Gallowgate, they overtook a delicate youth, Jimmie Wilson, the son of a small shop-keeper at Craigellachie and Adam's stable-mate. Jimmie and Adam had both won bursaries or scholarships of £15, and on this meant to pay their College fees and live through the five months of the Winter Session. Even in Aberdeen this was bedrock economy.

Three abreast found walking on the road a perilous journey. Wordie's lorries rattled them on to the pavement, or else it was a coal-cart. Here a fish-wife, shawled in tartan, heralded her "Herrin', fresh herrin', five a peeny." Bare-legged bairns ran between their legs in blind games;

then catching sight of the students' scarlet gowns ran shrilly after them crying, "Buttery Willie Collie!" Why Willie Collie was "buttery" is a problem that still puzzles the historian, but so long as students wear red gowns in Aberdeen, so long will rude little boys shout out this derisive name.

Braw lassies bantered Adam's ruddy cheeks in dialect broader than his own, till at last they were glad to reach even the dismal corner of MacGillivray's Court, where Adam and Jimmie shared half a kitchen.

"Ye munna mind Mrs. Gregor, the wumman that keeps us," said Adam as they approached the Court. "She jist glories in unnecessary self-sacrifice. But she'll sew up yer gown fine."

Of all the Courts in the Gallowgate, MacGillivray's Court had what Adam called "the most refined stink." Fragrant with dried fish and Mrs. Gibb's washing, it flaunted various notes of colour provided by the petticoats, chemises and other un-namable underclothes which formed Mrs. Gibb's stock-in-trade. The steam that Mrs. Gibb failed to swallow emerged from her window, filling the Court with an odour which could easily be distinguished from that at the entrance. In the thick wall of the arch through which one reached the Court was a door, leading to inner darkness. Darkness inhabited, however, for it emitted snores; also an aroma as of dead mice.

"That's the scaffie," explained Adam.

"The scaffie?"

"Aye, the scavenger, as you fowk ca' him. But it's his wife that's drunk."

Mrs. Gibb's window was beyond the house where Adam lodged. He was on a first floor, reached by a flight of stone-steps from the pavement itself. Adam mounted slowly and noisily to warn Mrs. Gregor of their approach, enabling George to take still further stock of the place.

One fair picture in this frame of squalor. A little mite of two years old was being taught to walk by six or seven other mites barely older than herself. Her stumpy, totter-

ing legs were almost hidden by her red frock, but not so the yellow curls which danced gaily over her tent face. Watching her was an unwieldy woman, narrowing the Court with her vast bulk. At last the fat, motherly heart bubbled over.

"Eh, whit bonny!" she cried, and, gathering the little one up in her arms, she kissed her again and again.

"Pit the bairns oot," said Adam, as they entered a room noisy with children. "We're for work."

"Aye, an I'll pit mysel' oot as well, if that'll help," said a melancholy person in petticoats who was evidently the landlady, Mrs. Gregor.

"Na, na, I want ye to sew up this chap's gown."

"Wad he tak' a glass o' milk, like? There's some I got for the bairns' tea, but they can dae fine withoot."

"Na, na," said Adam, winking solemnly at George. "He drinks naethin' less than champagne. Now, wumman, haud yer jaw! We maun hae quiet."

The room that served these worthies from Craigellachie as study, parlour and bedroom, also sufficed as kitchen, nursery and dining-room for Mrs. Gregor and her six children. The double-bed did not occupy more than a quarter of the space, so there was really no need for Mrs. Gregor to knock against either the table or the two wooden chairs. Considering the outside of the house, the room was surprisingly large, though hardly an ideal place for study. Mrs. Gregor commenced to sew, standing near the window for the light, while Adam perched himself on the bed, saving dispute about the chairs.

"Let's dae a bit o' the *Alcestis*," he said. "Euripides is fine and simple."

They took it in turns to read and translate, the other two commenting and criticising. Time passed quickly enough, but George felt his attention distracted by such surroundings. Adam was reading, and they had come to the farewell scene between Alcestis and Admetus. Adam plunged through the translation as if he were at a ploughing match.

"*'And lo!'*" he was translating, "*'my eye darkens and grows heavy.'*"

"What do you think of Browning's rendering?" said George. "He puts it like this: *'And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now.'*"

"No bad," said Adam. "Weel then, *'I am lost if you do not leave me, woman'*—God, wumman, what are ye haverin' at?"

George started, and then saw that this was not meant as a variant translation, but an address to Mrs. Gregor. The latter was muttering at the window.

"Law, Mr. Adam!" she said, "I was jist lookin' oot. If iver I saw death, it's on the face of that Mrs. Purdie's bairn. God behear us, I maun see to it."

"Weel, weel, see to it. *'I am lost,'*" he repeated, "*'if indeed you leave me, woman.'*"

"*'Wife'* or *'lady,'*" suggested Jimmie Wilson.

"*'Landlady,'*" said Adam, scowling at the retreating figure of Mrs. Gregor. "To continue, *'Speak of me as nothing, for I no longer am.'* Then says Admetus, *'Lift up thy countenance, do not leave thy children.'*"

By this time Mrs. Gregor had come back, bearing in her arms the sick baby she had seen. A bloodshot creature stumbled after her, and Adam for a moment looked up angrily.

"*'Not willingly indeed,'*" he growled.

But George lost the rest of the translation in the living tragedy. Mrs. Gregor had taken the baby to the fire, and was trying to warm its poor white feet.

"Gie me my bairn," the mother was sobbing. "It's nae but a wee bit cauld."

"Na, she's mair nor cauld. She has death in her face."

"*'Lift your eyes,'*" came the voice of the translator.

A hoarse whisper, "Gie me my bairn—she's mine."

"*'I am no more.'*"

"God! she's deein'."

"God! she's mine!"

"*'What doest thou? Dost thou leave me?'*"

"Oh me! Oh me!"

"*'Farewell!—I am lost in misery'*—God, wumman, whatever are ye daein'. That's the bed."

"Aye, an' that's a bairn that's deein'," said Mrs. Gregor, as she wrapped the little bundle in the blankets.

"Weel, it's no gaun to dee in my bed. It's me that sleeps there," said Adam pushing her roughly back.

"Gie me my bairn," said the haggard mother. The tears had furrowed the dirt beneath her cheekbones, and if she had a husband, it must have been he who bashed her front teeth out. Hers was a face to hit at.

George could stand it no longer. Catching up his gown and his books, he hurried out.

CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH SET

GEORGE sickened as he walked along, remembering that miserable slum. Over and over again the sordid picture passed before him, blinding him to everything else. Adam Grant was a brute! Of what use was the study of the "Humanities," if the soul of the student was left inhuman?

Although he lived in a city where a pound a week was affluence, this was the first time that George came face to face with real poverty. The urchins that played about the gutters, ran bare-foot all the summer, but bare feet were so common that they seemed quite natural. Down at the Castlegate he once had heard a Socialist talk about the down-trodden masses, but it never occurred to George that these masses really existed, or rather barely existed, just a few streets off. These things might be true of London slums, but the Aberdeen that he knew was a middle-class city of more or less respectable shopkeepers and professional men, some worse off than others but all a world apart from this underworld of squalor. A pound a week went a long way when herrings were five a penny. There were beggars of course, but some of these were reputed rich, such as Old Thursday, the organ-grinder, said to be worth a thousand pounds. But this verminous warren—ugh!

The Gallowgate itself, being a thoroughfare, was wider than the Courts on either side of it, but it was a sordid street with the same squalid atmosphere. Life was here in rags and dirty faces, rough of the tongue and brutalised by cheap drink. Although he had often traversed it, George realised for the first time all its wretchedness. How different must

be the sunny skies of Greece and Rome! Yet even Imperial Rome had such foul passages, as Juvenal could tell him.

What could he do? How helpless he was! Had he been a medical he might have known of something for that dying child. As it was, he could just pass on.

It was not long before he came to Marischal College, that part of the University at which medicine is taught. A narrow gate led into a wide quadrangle, where students, older and a thought more serious than the boys at King's, crossed to and fro to their various classes. They wore no scarlet gown, but their notebooks gave them the academic touch.

A number of notices were pinned up on a board inside a cage, and as George read these he wondered whether he was wise in not going in for medicine. His Greek and Latin led to—what? A schoolmastership perhaps. All his life was like to be spent on books, in a world of the dead, while here all round him was the world of the living.

It must be a fine thing to be a doctor, to be able to give health to the sick. Were he to take his M.D. he could give his life up to a practice in such slums as those around the Gallowgate. He had an income of his own, and had no need of fees. Would it not be fine to be known as the poor man's doctor, working without reward in those overcrowded alleys, beloved by all and dying at last, a hero and a martyr, smitten down by diphtheria caught from some fever-stricken patient? George pictured himself lying in the hospital with nurses round his bed, whispering to themselves, and his throat gulped as he imagined the sermons that would be preached and the eloquent obituary that would appear in the *Journal* and the *Free Press*.

But as he turned again into the street, a breath of filthy air from an open door brought him back to the present, and he realised that he was not yet a hero. Horrible smell! Could he ever again go into such a loathsome air as that of MacGillivray's Court?

In Union Street the shrill east wind nipped the passers-by and quickened every step. It blew the dreams out of

George's brain and made his lungs so sore that he feared he had caught a chill. It was wise to shake this off with a glass of brandy.

The saloon he entered was noisy with the so-called English set at Aberdeen, medical students sent to this northern University in the expectation of a cheap and easy degree. Not so easy for some of them, since the Professor whose door-knocker they tore off on uproarious nights paid his probable tormentors back by "ploughing" them at their examinations. Cheap it certainly was, especially if one did not pay one's debts. That was why the Englishmen were not favourites in the town.

At this date it was modish to wear knickerbockers and that form of gaiter known as "spats," a covering of the leg which is twice blessed, for it suggests the country gentleman and conceals the thinness of the calf.

The saloon habit in this brave town was not confined to Englishmen, but this particular saloon was the Englishmen's resort, the natives favouring a less conspicuous stage for their potations. The true born Aberdonian likes tradition, and when he drinks he is inclined to drink on the eastern and older side of Union Bridge.

Union Bridge! How many tragedies and comedies have crowned your single span! The street narrowed when it topped your arch, for the councillors who built you loved economy, and a little jostling mattered less if it meant a bawbee more in each ratepayer's pocket. You were narrowest on Sundays, when those trim troops of church-goers smiled to themselves on their way to their respective pulpits—the East Kirk and the West Kirk, the Free and the Established—each with its hour and a half's entertainment for a penny in the plate. You were perhaps broadest when the night had thrown its cover over staggering steps or a nod to a giggling girl. Underneath your passage of night and day was the traffic of the trains, and on your granite blocks the occasional rumble of Bain's old cabs. You were the meeting place and the dividing place of East and West, of work and leisure.

The faces round the bar were more or less familiar, but none were well enough known for George to greet. Most familiar was a heavy-jawed, clean-shaven man whose curious limping gait had often caught his eye. It was a "You be damned" sort of strut which proclaimed this biped as of conscious birth. George had heard him named as Wolseley Greville, and had connected with him a reputation which fitted that handsome, dissipated face.

Among companions Greville was less patronising, indeed there were some who thought him low. His risky stories and his readiness to stand a drink brought him easy friendship. Where the money came from, no one knew.

As George came in, they were laughing at some story Greville had related.

"You're a devil of a chap!" said one. "And now your latest conquest."

"Impossible, my dear fellow. That is really private."

"Rot! Out with it."

"Brandy, please," said George to the barmaid, who was absorbed in Greville.

"Well, if I must—but you won't tell?" Greville stroked his chin conceitedly. "You know little Molly Arnold with the golden hair and blue eyes, the dear?"

George had not meant to listen, but this name was familiar. The girl in question lived in the next street to his. That very morning he had seen her tripping past his window.

"Well," continued Greville, "I've found her out. Her mother keeps what are known as 'digs' in Crown Street."

"Never!"

"Yes, and I now occupy these digs. Mere chance, or rather a divine Providence. I saw a notice of 'Apartments' as I looked for rooms this session. I knocked—and there was my fairy——"

"And her mother," interjected a thick-set, heavy-eyed fellow who went by the nickname of Browser.

"And her mother, you bet. Such a mother! Well, I settled down to work——"

"Off the whisky."

"Shut up, Browser. I settled down with the best intentions, but very soon I shut my books. I had made a discovery. The girl, as you know, is pretty—dresses like a lady—glorious——"

"Beer," growled Browser.

"So I never told any one about this, especially Browser, who would have tried to cut me out. Well, I discovered that this charming creature, who was my landlady's daughter, was indeed—a landlady's daughter. When I was out, she read my letters. I found the prints of her fairy fingers on my private correspondence—you know that correspondence. What was more, the weekly bill—you know that weekly bill—which I really do pay at the beginning of the session, went up and up. I had chicken one day for dinner and ate a wing. The next day I saw no chicken and asked why. 'Mother made it into soup,' said the darling, without a blush. You know that chicken soup. I said nothing, but I made up my mind to get even."

Greville paused. The girl at the bar pushed over "the usual."

"I became sweeter than ever to the darling, and only last week, my dear fellows, I consoled myself for the vanished chicken with a much more delicious morsel."

The leer that accompanied the words made it only too evident what he meant. Some one sniggered, and the rest followed suit.

George felt the blood rush to his face.

Then a tall man, who stood a little apart, stepped up to Greville.

"You low-down cad," he said.

Greville turned black with fury. He was no coward.

"What do you mean?" he hissed, and flung himself on the other.

In a moment he was hurled back against the bar.

"If you weren't already crawling with disease," sneered the tall man, "I'd smash your dirty face."

By this time the landlord had heard the noise of the scuffle and rushed in.

"Stop there!" he cried. "Out you go, both of you."

"He began it," panted Greville.

"The cur is right," said the tall man coolly. "Sorry, Jim, I don't want to get you into trouble."

So saying he walked quietly out.

"Who is that?" said every one at once.

"That's young Mr. Sands, just back from China, the tailor's son."

"The tailor's son!"

A yell of execration followed. They all claimed to be "gentlemen."

"Why," said Browser, "he lives at Peterfield. Let's smash his windows."

"Better be careful, Browser," said another. "Have you paid his father's bill?"

"Aye," said the landlord, "and his father's on the bench. Be good, boys, and don't get me into trouble with those baillies."

Turning the affair into a laugh, he retired into his back parlour.

"Surely," said some one, "this man Sands plays football. He's a Nomad."

"Don't Nomads play the Varsity to-morrow?"

"The very thing," said Greville. "We'll maim him."

"Who are playing?"

Three of those present had been selected for the team. And so, with another drink all round for luck, they tumbled boisterously out of the bar, Greville last of all, limping heavily. Sands had shaken him severely.

"Nice lot they are!" said the landlord, following them out. "As for that Greville——"

"My!" said the girl in the bar, "but ain't he got money!"

George sauntered back to his lodgings thinking it all over. He had forgotten the dying slum child in this later tragedy. How pitiable it was! Molly Arnold was so

pretty, and always looked sweet and innocent. The whole story was sordid, and yet it was so possible. "A delicious morsel," and this devil had deliberately ruined her. What help for her now?

"A landlady's daughter."

He knew the type.

Hell!

It was impossible to work.

CHAPTER III

EARLY DAYS AT ABERDEEN

IT was at a bazaar that George had first very nearly got to know this Molly Arnold.

Bazaars are not exclusive to Aberdeen, but they are certainly the very essence of its being. For in this clean, bustling city, the most inobservant stranger must notice the overflow of churches, not only on a Sunday, when streets are thronged with the devout, but every day in the week as well. And if he be at all inquisitive, he will surely find that where there is a church there is a debt, and where there is a debt sooner or later there must be a bazaar, for which young, middle-aged and grey-haired conspire together to sew, knit or otherwise concoct countless articles of more or less vertu, which are purchased liberally for the glory of God by members of the congregation and their friends.

George had once been inveigled into such by a stall-holding relative, and after shedding much good silver upon things he had no earthly use for, he met the golden-haired Molly, also a stallholder, who offered him a ball of rosy shaving paper at "a shilling to you." She and the rosy ball were both irresistible, and as the coin changed hands she smiled upon him, and his heart went pit-a-pat after her all the rest of that evening and for many evenings after. He would have begged acquaintance of her there and then in spite of natural shyness, had not those very shaving-balls been the triumph of the whole bazaar. Every man must have one, and Molly and her golden hair were never to be caught for any kind of introduction except the exchange of cash.

Sometimes thereafter he attended her church, seeking a remote and uncomfortable pew from which he could watch her through his fingers at the prayers without any one suspecting his devotion. But her delight in church must have been but lukewarm, for on several occasions he had to sit through a sermon an hour long without a sight of her, she being busy at home reading more cheerful literature than the Book of Job or the Epistle to the Galatians. Three Sundays running found him thus deceived, and henceforth he contented himself with long, circuitous walks which somehow included the passage of her street and a nervous glance at her window. The shaving-ball itself had for a while been considered too sacred to mutilate for its original purpose, but only for a while, for even at seventeen the lovesick swain has lucid intervals.

Yet surely it would not have been so difficult to win acquaintance. She was not stand-offish, as he could see—indeed was one of those thirty-three thousand, half the female population, who on a Saturday night paraded Union Street and giggled along the granite pavements with another girl on each arm and every man in her eye. Those thirty-three thousand do not really mean mischief. They are of the good city of Aberdeen and not of Piccadilly, and what down South would be the downward path, up North is just high spirits. But even so, and even though he knew that he had only to be bold, he dared not.

The Aberdonian is reckoned the hardest-headed of all the Scots, not truly, but because the successful have modestly ascribed their virtues to their clan. The failures, such as George Grange's father, are forgotten. An amiable fool, generous beyond his means, the elder Grange pottered through life in a lawyer's office which mismanaged the affairs of its clients. William Grange's hobby was the pedigree through which he traced a seventh cousinship with an earl. This nobleman had spent the money gained by City swindles in turning populous valleys into desolate deer forests, parading at Highland gatherings his

kilted spindles and bonneted bald head. But to William Grange he was always a hero and a seventh cousin.

Mrs. Grange was another type familiar to the Granite City—the wife who dresses beyond her allowance. Like many of her gossips, she supplemented her income by forgetting to forward the school-fees of her children. Exposure came when the leading private school went bankrupt. The Court called in the arrears, and down went the Church collections.

William Grange was an honest fool. When he had found out his wife's deception, he welcomed a death which left her the legacy of pedigree and poverty. Mrs. Grange, for her part, wasted no vain regrets. Within a year she owned more purple, more fine linen, and another husband, whose purse made up for his appearance. There were unkind rumours of earlier acquaintance, for the unpaid school-fees could hardly have covered her old milliner's bills. But if these tales were true, all the more dramatic justice in her death. She died in childbirth.

Never mind the name of her second husband. He makes a graceful exit from this story by settling £200 a year on George, now left to his own devices.

George was by now seventeen. Had he been trained at the Grammar School his reading would have been less erratic, and he might have made more friends; but a private school had been his fate. Here the teaching was irregular for the reason that the underpaid masters were for ever quitting their employer. George was in this way free to follow unfettered tastes, to sip, here and there, a little Latin, a little Greek, a little French, a little German, more for the poetry than for the prose of every literature. The only prose that gripped him was the prose of Balzac, of Flaubert and of Guy de Maupassant—found on his mother's book-shelves—and here it was the life that took his fancy, not the niceties of style.

Although in this way he had come to have a knowledge of life, it was only a book-knowledge. It must be granted to the credit of that northern city that the main streets

flaunted very little other real vice than drunkenness. The thirty-three thousand girls, of whom Molly Arnold was one, were for the most part giddy innocents who required a real Don Juan to betray them. Don Juan George was not, although he loved his Byron and dreamed the voluptuous delights of all such heroes. In a certain quaint old dictionary of classical mythology he had solved a little of the mystery of sex, but through fatal shyness was unable even to stammer a good night to the living Venus. Fortunate perhaps for George, for he would have probably been snubbed.

The red-haired Aphrodite of his clime had little use for one who looked so like a milksop. She was a vigorous goddess, ruddy-cheeked herself with the east wind, admirer of impudence and muscle. Her prithee-why-so-pale-fond lover must remain willynilly an ascetic. Perhaps she might have been softened at the shine of gold. But George had a thrifty purse. His mother, in her luscious finery, had taught him to fear God and do without pocket-money. Now he had his own income, but he had acquired the habit of the narrow path. And after all he was not unhealthily unclean.

Byron was his favourite author, Byron whose old house in Broad Street he never passed without a thrill. Once a week he walked to the ancient Brig o' Balgownie, never crossed without his remembering the little club-footed lad of curly locks and tiny ears, who had timorously looked this way and that for the "mare's ae foal" which presaged the bridge's ruin. Byron was an only son, and it is said that the old spell haunted him:

"Brig o' Balgownie, wight's your wa'
Wi' a wife's ae son and a mare's ae foal
Doun sall ye fa'."

From such a shrinking childhood had grown the poet of revolution. Wondering if such might be his own future, George used to gaze into the depths beneath the arched shadow of the bridge—unfathomable they were said to be—

and let the fancy roam till the racing heart recalled him.

And then he dreamed dreams, writing the poetry one writes at seventeen. Molly Arnold with her golden hair had been his Beatrice.

His first home had been in the secluded quietness of Dee Street, but his mother on her second marriage sniffed at any neighbourhood that was not near the more fashionable Queen's Cross. With her death came independence, and George returned to the old street, migrating discontentedly from one lodging to another. Little things decided the change: a succession of bad eggs, an harmonium, a landlady who would not cook on Sundays. The rooms to which at last he settled down pleased him because of their bareness. The front room had no cheap and tawdry chintzes to disturb his nerves. There were no texts saying in pink that "God is Love," or in purple that "We are but Little Children Weak."

The bare walls, which had hitherto deprived the landlady of many a prospective lodger, appealed to George. He was able to decorate them with an eye-high border of his own device, consisting of wood engravings from old numbers of "Good Words," "The Leisure Hour" and "Once a Week," pictures that had delighted his solitary childhood in the lumber-room of his parents' house. The landlady, with a view to cleanliness, had abjured the usual wall-paper with the usual floral design, confining herself to a washable distemper of neutral grey. The border of engravings puzzled her, but she felt a sneaking respect for a lodger who, like herself, had dared to be original. The only other ornament was made up from a more famous frieze, that of the Parthenon. Five large platinotypes from the Northern section had been mounted by George on a long piece of cardboard and bent into a circle. This was his table centre-piece. Wherever he sat, he could see the rhythm of that perfect cavalcade.

In the corner to the right of the window was his book-case, with shelves arranged according to the colour of the

bindings, not the contents. One comfortable chair dozed before the fire, with a wooden stool to put one's feet on. On a hook beside the fireplace hung his scarlet gown.

George had matriculated at the University simply because he was seventeen. That is the age decreed by Heaven for the youth of Aberdeen as ripe for higher things. Cleverer schoolmates had won the bursaries bequeathed to help poor students and entrusted to the discretion of a Senatus. The dullards had drifted into business or more gentlemanly sloth. King's College certainly suited George's purse. He was affluent there, but the poverty of those who were not of his class was only equalled by their pride, and George remained an outsider. Adam Grant spoke to him only once after that memorable day with Euripides. It was on the following Monday, and the Celtic giant still absent from the class. The Professor had not yet come in, and the more lusty lungs were filling time with the harmonious strains of the "Old Hundredth." Adam leaned over to George.

"What made ye scoot like yon?" he asked.

"Nothing," stammered George. "Only that child——"

"Eh, man!" said Adam. "Ye're a puir thing." Then turned his back on him.

The snarl went home. A poor thing indeed! Why could he not howl with these barbarians?

Had George played better football, he might have lived a healthier life. He had no fear of bruises, but he was a muff at games.

There were of course the "grinders," whose pale faces mirrored midnight oil, and George was envious of even their acquaintance; but their company was books. Some indeed were said to read their sixteen hours a day. George had a headache after six. Still, he seemed to have a knack of translation. Perhaps he would enlarge respect at the next examinations.

Such conditions herded him more and more into himself. His slender figure became familiar by the sea on the edge

of Balgownie Links, or stooping over the catalogue in the Library at King's. As yet his pleasure in the open air was vague. If he felt the tenderness of atmosphere, he would fit the mood to verse.

What his ultimate career should be still troubled George. Sometimes he thought to write books, but the Fates had hitherto shone unkindly on his literary effort. Occasionally verses travelled to a London paper, only to re-travel with the usual regrets from the Olympian editor. The local comic paper had been equally unsympathetic.

Ambition was thus snailed within its shell.

George had some relatives, of course, in a city of such generous families, but except for casual greetings in the street, he hardly spoke to them. He knew they called him boorish for not visiting, but gradually he assumed and lived up to the old motto of Earl Marischal that hangs in Marischal College:

THEY HAIF SAID. QUHAT SAYE THEY?
LAT YAME SAYE.

Let them say, indeed!

That haunting motto coloured the fancied slights from fellow students as shy and unpolished as himself. After all, what mattered it if they preferred another's company, and perhaps laughed at him behind his back?

Let them laugh!

"They haif said. Quhat saye they?" the words shaped every mood. When he mooned about in lovesick adolescence, dreaming of the golden-haired enchantress, whose windows he would pass shamefacedly by night, the words stepped out with him upon the granite pavements:

"They haif said. Quhat saye they? Lat yame saye!"

In such a mood he wrote a sonnet which in due course returned from the usual editor—not much of a sonnet, perhaps, but worth giving here as a record of his fancy:

They Haif Said. Quhat Saye They? Lat Yame Saye.

They say—what say they?—that a heart of gold
Is naught but vain and perishable ware,
And true love passes as a sudden air,
Warm for an hour, and in an hour run cold.
Dear Heart! the very memory we hold
Of Eden, and of all the frangrance there
When we were young and you were very fair—
That too must death within his Shadow fold.

What say they? What if all our love be vain,
And all our kisses with the night be blown
Into oblivion to the Unknown Way!
Give me your lips, give me your lips again
And yet again, until the Way be shown!
And till the Night enfoldeth, let them say.

One College Society, the Literary, blossomed an oasis in his desert. Here were banquets with the gods, and here new planets swam into his ken. Oh, that glorious night with Rossetti, and, oh, the resonant voice that half chanted the sonnet on a picture by Giorgione:

“Water, for anguish of the solstice—nay,
But dip the vessel slowly—nay, but lean
And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in
Reluctant.”

George was furious next day when no reproduction of the picture could be found in any book in all the Library.

Sentiment is hard to kill at seventeen. However much George must believe the story he had overheard of Molly Arnold, still he remembered that she was fair. Pity and curiosity piled up fresh fuel for the romance that truth had damped, and, if ever he felt tired of books and turned out any night for a breath of air, his steps were drawn to the neighbouring Crown Street, and his eyes involuntarily lifted to her familiar window. A shadow fell upon the blind, the shadow of the Lady Might-Have-Been. So he rhymed her in many a rondeau, many a villanelle.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOOTBALL MATCH

FOOTBALL was not a game at which George shone, and so when Saturday came round he found himself unpicked for any side, and therefore at a loose end. This indeed caused him small regret, for he wished to see the match between the Varsity and Nomads with the sequel of that row between Sands, the tailor's son, and the Englishman in the bar.

Life cannot make us anything but tamed barbarians. If we ourselves no longer fight, we still are whole-souled lookers-on, if only to make sure the fight is fair. Now between the Varsity and Nomad football clubs there was at this time furious rivalry, and the likelihood of rough play no doubt added to the crowd of lookers-on. A fine afternoon helped to fill the ground at King's still further, and when the whistle blew you could see half young Aberdeen behind the ropes.

Nomads in their terra-cotta jerseys looked more heavy than the students in their blue and gold. Some of them were graduates settled down to practise in the town, but not too old to feel the joy of a good game. Others might be engineers, or else young business men with money enough to play as amateurs. What they scored in weight, however, they lost in training, so that the scales were nicely balanced.

Sands was a Loretto boy, and his bright red stockings showed conspicuous. He was not well known to the crowd, but his game a week before had won him reputation, and the Varsity Captain passed round word that this man must be marked. This was just what Browser and his

fellows wanted—they could do their hacking now with all the better conscience—it was “orders.”

Sands, the tailor's son, by this time had forgotten all about the row in the saloon, but after five minutes' rough and tumble he remembered faces and suspected something more than football. Five minutes more convinced him.

“Look out, sir,” came a warning voice as he was dashed across the touch line. “They mean to hurt you.”

Now Sands might be a tailor's son, but tailors' sons have hearts as well as shins, and when your tailor's son has learnt the game at Loretto and again in the school of the world out East, he may prove as game a cock as your bluest-blooded bantam. When therefore he found he was marked by malice he tightened his belt for the roughest play that ground had known.

In spite of the sun, it was a day for forwards, the ground being clammy still from previous rains. Dribble and scum—they called it “maul” up there in those days—followed scrum and dribble. There were many sore heads, Browser's among them, on the Varsity side, for Sands charged in like a battering ram, and a bullet head with fifteen stone behind it, well aimed, left an impression even on the head of your English medico. Then if it came to hacking or scragging, two could play at that game, Sands being one of the two. Innocent suffered with the guilty, for the tailor's son had no time to pick and choose.

Sands was so tall that the Nomad half-backs instinctively threw out to him from touch. As he got the ball he was violently downed. Greville was prominent in the crowd, howling for Browser, especially when Sands seemed damaged.

Half-time came as a relief to most of the spectators. The game was too much in earnest. They felt that there was something wrong, and though they did not ask for kid gloves this was more like battle-axes. Sands was evidently singled out for blame, every one arguing excitedly about his style.

As George loafed round looking for a new place he smiled

sarcastically, knowing what was really in the wind. The roof of the old chapel caught his eye, and then the old spider-crown of King's, and he wondered how many quarrels had been fought out under its peaceful shadow. Peace was supposed to be the prerogative of learning, that veneer on human nature.

As he passed the primitive enclosure serving as a grand stand in the centre of the ground, he looked to see if Molly Arnold was about. Yes, she was, she and her golden hair. She seemed to be alone; at any rate Greville left her unattended.

The whistle blew for the second half.

"We've got the wind with us now," said the Nomad captain. "Play a more open game."

These tactics won, for almost instantly the ball was dribbled down past the Varsity defence and Sands scored the first try. Play grew rougher than ever after this try was converted and excitement ran fierce.

"Buck up, Varsity!" "Go it, Sands!" "Well played, Browser!"

Wolseley Greville was limping round and yelling his loudest.

A long punt from the Nomad centre—they played with three three-quarters in those days—reached touch close to the Varsity line and the forwards reeled up. Sands intercepted the throw-out, only to be hurled down. As the ball slipped out of his hands Browser flung himself on Sands's head. The latter by a powerful twist escaped severe injury and rose up in a passion. As the Varsity drove back their opponents the ball came into Browser's hands. Sands crunched him, there was a crack that sounded all over the ground, and Browser fell limp with a broken shoulder.

The umpire whistled furiously to stop the game and waved his hands excitedly as he came up to Sands.

"You're playing too rough, sir. I've a good mind to warn you off."

"Yah! Yah!" yelled Greville from the crowd.

Browser heard the wrangle where he lay. Raising himself with a great effort, he said between his teeth:

"Don't blame him, umpire. It was my fault—not his."

Then he fainted and was carried away.

Most of the ladies present left the ground at this, but the game went on and ended without further incident. George kept an eye on the enclosure, and saw that Molly Arnold still remained. When the crowd had quite dispersed she still lingered, evidently waiting for some one—no doubt Greville. That gentleman, however, had gone off without her and she returned alone.

She passed George in the quadrangle, rather pale of face and downcast. He, on his part, walked behind her at a little distance, wondering and pitying.

This was a rough world.

The Lady Might-Have-Been had such a graceful figure.

What a cad Greville was!

And so home.

A fortnight afterwards he heard that Greville had suddenly cleared out of the town.

"A good thing too," said George's informant. "That barmaid——"

Then some one interrupted and the conversation was never renewed. The examinations were at hand and everything else was for the time forgotten.

Yet if Greville had disappeared, so, too, had Molly Arnold. A notice "To Let" in the window told its own tale.

A couple of sonnets to the Lady Might-Have-Been, and then a newer interest swept out for the time all memory of her passage.

CHAPTER V

NATHANIEL REID, ARTIST

NO man who has not passed through college can understand how terrible the word "Examination" looms on the horizon. The prisoner at the bar feels but a tithe of those tremblings and those terrors that overhang the judgment seats of learning.

Dark days and sleepless nights.

At the end of the first session George, like the rest, submitted to the ordeal. After a time word went round that the Greek results were out, so he hurried over to King's to find his place on the list.

Some had already found their places. On the way out he passed a dozen varying expressions, radiant or don't-care. Two, who had come out higher in the list than work had warranted, were staggering on to further libations.

The crowd around the notice-board at first impeded him. Ah! there he was! Only forty-first!

So much for his ambition!

He tried to work off disappointment along the well-tramped road to Galgownie. In another hour he was refreshed by the keen March air, in the bright world seen and felt. As then he leaned over the New Bridge of Don, and looked across that lovely stretch of water to the Bar, he whispered to himself his favourite verses from his favourite poet:

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,

From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal."

"Fine, isn't it?" said a voice behind him, and George started to face a grizzly-bear sort of man, whose colour-box and easel proclaimed him an artist. Those shaggy cheeks and chin and eyebrows, however, could not conceal the kindly expression of the mouth and eyes. A burly man he was, with arms like hooks.

"They can talk of Greece up at the College," continued the stranger, "but give me Balgownie."

"Yes," said George, somehow losing his shyness, "it is fine. But the Greeks, too, loved the ocean. Remember the 'wine-dark sea' of Homer."

Thus opened a new friendship.

Nathaniel Reid, the artist, had a wonderful way of winning confidence. Before a day was over George had told him things that he himself had hardly realised: how he hated the drudgery of work for examinations, how little sympathy he had for the other fellows, how much he wanted a chum, how aimless all his life had been. These confidences began over a cup of tea in Reid's own room, walled with canvases and panels.

"This is only just my workshop, or rather my store-room," said the artist. "My real workshop is the open air. Nature, sonny, is the great inspiration. When ye go home, burn all yer books, save only Keats, and don't read him except under the roof that God put up before they built the University. To tell the honest truth, ye'll be a ninny if ye keep on as ye are doin'. Ye want more air."

"It's fine for you to talk," said George. "You can paint and have your friends in Nature and the open country. I see that these things are beautiful, but I don't know why. I seem to miss half the beauty that you get a hold of."

"Maybe," replied the artist, with a shake of the head, "maybe no."

Then they went out again, ending with supper at George's rooms. Reid stared at the unexpected decorations.

"Are ye no wantin' to be an artist yerself?" he said, looking round him.

"Whatever made you think so?" answered George in surprise. "I never put so much as pencil to paper."

"Well, ye've got the guts of it, anyway. Ye're no such a fool, if this is yer own thinkin'. Who told ye to choose these illustrations ye've made a border of? There's Frederick Sandys, and an early Whistler, and old North when he was young, and du Maurier before he was Society, and Simeon Solomon when he was still only a Jew. Man, these were giants in those days."

"I just found them," said George. "I liked them."

"And this procession from the Parthenon? Oh, of course, ye learned of it at the College."

"No, no! Only dry translations there—nothing about the life. Just words—not things."

Reid was silent for a minute or two.

"I'll tell you what, sonny," he said at last. "I'm no a man of words either. But sometimes I'm thinkin'. It's like this. Ye've got yer exams over for the now. Why not spend the next six months lookin' for what ye've missed all yer life—beauty, nature, art! Ye've got it in you, sonny. Paint, man, paint!"

"I mightn't be any good."

"Ye can damned well try, anyway. Come with me, sonny, and I'll guarantee to teach you the elements. Ye tell me ye have money enough to live on without working for it. Then, for God's sake, live, and don't grovel on at yon College. There's no such a book as the Book of Nature. Read that."

They were to meet again next day at the New Bridge of Don—"four o'clock in the afternoon," said Reid.

George spent a sleepless, excited night, with thoughts racing out to the future. Already he pictured himself with pale intellectual face and distinguished air passing along the streets. Already he could hear the people whisper as

they pointed to him: "That's George Grange, the famous R.A."

Youth and imagination soon vault a score of years.

Dawn came at last with fitful slumber and then, fresh with new hopes and always young in appetite, he sat down to a generous breakfast. After which, a visit to a dealer in artists' materials, who had no difficulty in selling him a box of Students' water-colours, two sable brushes, half a dozen sketching boards, and a book entitled "Practical Hints on Landscape Sketching" by Samuel Smith, F.R.I.B.A. What these letters meant was as yet unknown, but they sounded all right.

George spent all the morning over those practical hints, and by the hour of the midday meal he was quite pleased with himself. He had learnt by heart what colours to mix for a sky, what colours for a tree, what colours for heather, what for a rocky foreground, what for a lady's face. It was after all delightfully simple, and he wondered why he had never taken to Art before.

There were still two hours before he need set out, so he opened his box of colours, moistened a brush, rubbed a cake of colour, and commenced his first real subject—then his second—then his third.

After that, a very much humbler George set out for the meeting-place.

Reid was there before him, slapping in a note of the sky and cloud that hovered over the mouth of the Don. He had evidently been at work all day, for several panels, separated by corks, were leaned against the bridge.

"Gone!" he sighed at last, laying down his brushes. "Man, ye've got to be right slick to catch it."

George looked at the sketch, and felt still humbler when he remembered his own dreadful first attempts.

"Well, sonny," said Reid, as he put down his palette and lit a pipe, "how's Art?"

Then, catching sight of the book in George's pocket, he nicked it out and opened it with a broadening smile.

"To paint a tree—some Hooker's green with a little

Naples yellow for the high lights, etc., etc. Gosh! what next! For water in moonshine——”

Swish went the book over the parapet into the water. Reid spat after it, his face all red.

“Hoots, man,” he said after a moment, apologetically, “ye shouldna waste yer pennies on the likes o’ that. This is no a girl’s school that ye’re joining. What else have ye been doin’ with yerself, whiles?”

Very shamefacedly George produced his box of water-colours.

Reid opened it and made a movement to throw it after the book. However, he held his hand.

“No,” he said, “we’ll no spoil the clean water. Eh, man! ye meant well, but I should hae tell’t ye. Man, ye’ll no learn to be an artist this way, making Christmas cards with paints like yon. Not that a chap that knows couldna paint a good thing with yon paints, but that’s no the way to start. Ye’re not to touch a paint till ye’ve learnt to see and to discriminate. Come along with me, and I’ll explain it better.”

He picked up his things and went, George following, along the path that leads to the old Brig o’ Balgownie, then down the bank nearer the river’s edge.

Then, sticking up his easel, Reid pointed to a clump of trees.

“See yon?” he said. “Yon’s trees. Now what’s their colour?”

George hesitated.

“Yes,” he ventured at last, “they’re not so very green—more brown, I think.”

“Brown,” snorted Reid. “Just watch me paint them.”

First of all he brushed in a grey sky, and then silvery grey water, then shaped a mass of greyish blue, then a few touches of madder, then more shape with a darker and warmer grey, and then a light warm grey—and it was there.”

George compared with his eyes half-shut the real scene and the painted scene, and knew that Reid had seen truly.

"I couldn't have believed it till you did it," he said.

"Aye," said Reid. "That's the way to look and to paint—observation and analysis and harmonizing and construction and discrimination. It's no like writin' poetry, where ye just pile on adjectives that sound fine and mean nothing. Oh, I ken fine—I've written poetry mysel'! Now, what's the time?"

"Six o'clock."

"That's the first lesson," said Reid. "And now, what have ye learnt from it? Say yer say."

"I've learnt more in an hour than I learnt in six months at College. I've learnt that trees are not trees, but just the light that plays upon them."

Reid clapped him on the shoulder with a laugh that showed him the great boy that he was.

"Splendid, lad, splendid!" he said. "Ye'll be an artist yet."

Thus opened the happiest hour in George's life. Reid was the casual gardener into whose hands fell the seed which chance has ready for a peculiar soil.

CHAPTER VI

A LECTURE ON WOMEN

THESE were the days before the New Regulations disturbed the serene atmosphere of King's. There was just one curriculum for the degree of Arts, one road to knowledge, not seven hundred roads as there are to-day. The sweet girl undergraduate had not yet been let loose, the only privileged Venus being the girl who brought jam scones from Mundie, the Old Town baker. It was a poor man's University, and to meet the poor man's case the summer was left free so that he could serve in his father's shop if need be, or work in his father's fields, or however else he wished to butter the winter's bread.

A few who could afford it went to Germany, and came back from a summer session there even more ambitious than before to get out into the world as soon as they were able.

One spirit flames through the Aberdonian, and that is the spirit of ambition. If he sees no chance of realising that in his own city, out he goes, irrepressible emigrant, to make his fortune somewhere else. Self-confidence is his passport, and difficult indeed would be the frontier that could stop him. Not a brilliant brain, but a terrific worker, he just as often as not gets to where he wants to in the end.

What would have happened if all the Aberdonians had stayed in Aberdeen? Surely there would have been civil war.

Summer then would have been an idle time for George if this new interest of art had not come into his life. He had

no need to earn a wage, neither had he fancy to become a bookworm. There were, of course, the texts prescribed for summer reading, but these could surely be gone through in half the time available. Travel might have tempted him—indeed he had thought sometimes of following in Heine's footsteps through the Harz or tracing Goethe's passage over the Brenner on that great Italian journey. But Germany and Italy could wait. Here was something to do right now and right away.

It was as if his eyes had suddenly been opened. Never before had he realised just why it was that the road to King's was so attractive, with its one-story cottages and red-tiled roofs, so different from the tall granite houses and grey slate of the newer town. All such detail had escaped him until now, for his eyes had been glued to books.

Could he ever have spent such a spring as this was, poring over print? It was spring outside among the trees and flowers, and spring inside his heart, the sun singing "Come hither" to the sap of the world outdoors, and Reid with his gospel bringing life to the soul.

George grew healthier in mind and body every day, now that he spent so much time sketching in the open air. It was cold enough work in that Northern spring, for, unless it was really rough weather, Reid made him get out by earliest dawn. But then were surely the loveliest scenes of all, the air still tremulous with night, and twilight pervading in a thousand delicate gradations. Even the cold formal granite streets seemed to grow tender in the violet and rose and mauve and emerald in which the world was bathed at such an hour.

One morning was altogether too fierce for outdoor work. A brusque, penetrating, spring-cleaning sort of east wind turned up coat collars and buried hands yet deeper into muffs.

"Gran' day for gallopin' consumption," said Reid. "Poke up the fire, sonny, and gi'e us a wee bit baccy, nae bigger than a bum-bee's foot. Ooch ay, h-tish!"

When Reid sneezed it was wise to hold on to any loose

ornaments on the mantelpiece, for he had big lungs in that hairy chest of his; and, if the ribs had not been strong to match, the whole human arsenal might well blow up.

Sleet came slashing now upon the windowpanes.

"What think ye of yon for May!" he growled. "Come out, come out, my dearest dear, and catch a chill wi' me—h-tish, h-tish! Weel now, what's to be done? Nae use working out o' doors to-day. Ye'll just have to put up wi' still life till the morn's morn."

George sat in front of the fire kicking his heels without showing much enthusiasm. Still life did not appeal to him just yet, and he was becoming ambitious.

"What about getting a model in," he said, yet half afraid to say it. "Wouldn't it be more inspiring?"

"Ooch ay, I ken fine what ye're thinkin' aboot—a female model, a Venus in petticoats, or perhaps without them. No, sonny, no! Or as the Yankees say, 'Nothin' doin'.' See here—there's a pewter mug and a lemon and a spoon and the decanter and this silver sugar bowl—let's see what ye can make o' that."

"Colour?"

"Aye, colour—oils."

George sighed a little as he set to work. Reid was a more exacting master than he had yet had. There was more drudgery about this Art than he had ever thought. However, it had to be gone through.

Once he had started, it was not so bad. There was a keen pleasure in analysing the light that played upon these surfaces and in mixing colours that made their textures. When the clock struck one, and Reid's landlady brought in the dinner, George was loath to be disturbed. Ten minutes later he was back again at his painting, and except for a few brief rests never ceased till the light began to fall. Reid all the while was grumphing away at a canvas due for the R.S.A., a landscape with a low horizon capped by a vast bank of silvery grey clouds.

"Nae sae bad," he said, coming over to look at George's work. "That's what I call the real inspiration—not the

artificial stimulant of sex. Gosh! Don't I know! Havna I been there mysel'. Ye go an' get a bonny wee lass up on a platform, an' yer eyes get all fuddled up wi' a kind of a glow, and ye don't see a damn thing about her that ye ought to see. It's just the same in life itself. Here, sonny, when ye're as old as I am, ye'll no be sae keen to run after the lassies. But here's our tea—gooseberry jam and fresh scones—come on, we'll talk about a' yon foolishness after we've had somethin' to eat. Help yersel'."

Reid's landlady made delicious scones, and her gooseberry jam was most comforting. It was a cosy enough studio, and after they had finished they sat down in their arm-chairs to smoke and philosophise over the homely fire. George was willing to work all day for many a day, if only it ended in this friendly fashion. And Reid, being a philosopher, was glad to have his audience, if but an audience of one.

"Now about this drawing from the life and your wish for the livin' model, plainly with the intention of its being a lassie—this is a tendency noticeable in very young students who require this stimulus to their artistic impulse. This, however, they desire not *qua* artist but *qua* adolescent, liable to calf love, wishing to engage a pretty model not so much with the desire to draw her features and study the light and colour of her form, but so that she may serve as a basis for some fancy, dream, or picture. In the case of that ridiculously young art-student, George Grange, there is an unsettled sex condition which makes such stimulus particularly undesirable. For, sonny, judgin' from the ballades, sonnets, villanelles and the like which from time to time ye have read to me, ye've fallen in love, and judgin' by what I know of yer general character, ye've never had the spunk to speak to the lassie, and therefore are in the condition of unrequited affection, ripe to be diverted elsewhere.

"Well, I'm no blamin' ye or tellin' ye to stop, so long as she does not interfere with yer digestion. But take this from me, anything that puts a man off his porridge

is better left alone. Love, whether requited or unrequited, is a disturbing, meddlesome affection, and the less you see of the lassies the better for yer general health of body and peace of mind. For what does it all end in? Why it ends in yer gettin' married.

"Now, sonny, d'ye think you could put in a day's solid work like yon to-day if ye was married? See what would happen. There's bairns, twa, three, sprawlin' about and botherin' the life out o' ye, an' the wife keeps bobbin' in an' out o' the room where ye just want quiet, sayin' 'Geordie, rin oot an' fetch half-a-pun o' soap,' an' 'Geordie, what's a' that mess ye've been makin' in the kitchen sink?' an' 'Geordie, why can ye no fold yer trousers up tidy?' an' 'Geordie, where's the hammer an' the nails?' an' Geordie this an' Geordie that, till ye're driven fair daft and end by takin' to drink. Na, na, the lassies are fine for young chaps as want to write poetry, but so far as art goes they're no damned use."

"At least," said George, "there are some of them who can make good scones."

"Ooch ay," growled Reid, "if ye keep them in the kitchen."

He sucked his pipe for a while, smiling and shaking his head. Both of them drew up a little nearer the fire.

"What colour of hair has she, your lassie, I mean?" said Reid unexpectedly.

George blushed.

"Golden," he said at last rather huskily.

"So had mine," said Reid quite softly, as in a reverie. "And her eyes were blue, and her cheeks were as the damask rose—a dainty wee thing."

He stretched his fingers out, warming them close to the fire.

"Some day, sonny, when ye go to England, ye'll learn what roses are. There's a few we can grow up here, but not the way they grow away down in Hertford or Devon. These bitter winters cut down all our roses. It was a bitter winter that cut down mine."

A tear rolled down George's cheek in sympathy, but Reid did not notice it. He kept staring into the fire. At last he said:

"Well, sonny, so you want to work from the living model. A' recht, and so ye shall. But not yet a while. Ye're gettin' on fine as ye are, and there's lots of time yet. Once I get ye started on the right way of lookin' at things, I'll send ye down south to the schools there. Dinna think I've adopted ye for life, sonny. I'm just passin' ye on. Down there ye can learn another way of drawin' things, and ye can draw life, an' ye can see life. But bide a wee, bide a wee."

Such was one of many great evenings.

Sympathy with nature was the gospel that Reid taught, not tradition or authority.

This new life thrilled George in a way that books never could. With every sketch he felt he was creating something, not learning something by rote or merely translating.

He sold his classical text-books. He had made up his mind to give his life to art.

Reid's criticisms gave him little chance for conceit; yet they were not unkind, and they were encouraging.

One day, when George gave up a sketch because some one was looking over his shoulder, he said:

"Peg away, and ye'll get the nerve to paint yer grandmother in the middle of Piccadilly Circus."

"That's when I go to London," said George.

"Ay," said Reid, his face falling. "When ye go to London."

CHAPTER VII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

A TALL lanky man in spectacles was darting here and there over the moor, waving in his hand a slender rod, at the end of which was a circle of wire and a net. He seemed to be chasing moths. An adept, too, for every time he flicked the net he won some trophy for his bottle.

Curlews were calling overhead, while underfoot wolf-spiders prowled in tireless search for prey. Here, poised in dazzling splendour over the pond by Denmore Wood, was another hunter of moths, a dragon-fly, far crueller than man, for he nipped the bodies off and let the wings fall pitifully in the water.

The naturalist came up and watched his fellow hunter: then tied a muslin net to a stick and dragged for watery spoils. Pulling at last a handful of weeds, he would have passed on had he not noticed George sketching, or rather hiding his sketch.

"Hullo! Painting?"

"Trying to."

"Not much colour here. Ever looked through a microscope? That's the way to see the world. Poor things, trees—all one green. Poor thing, sky—all one blue. Oh, you artists! Blind! Blind! Blind! Hullo, there's a Painted Lady."

He was off like a madman, and zig-zagged out of sight after his ideal beauty.

A thousand such distractions at first used to dazzle George whenever they went to work. Most dazzling of all when they went to Reid's favourite painting ground on

Scotstoun Moor beyond Balgownie. In vain the older artist shook his head. The aimless education from which George had sipped had left its poison, and he could not school himself at once to concentration. How could he fix his mind on mere reflections of colour and light when there was a world humming and hunting and blooming about him—lizards to be chased, ants to be teased, forget-me-nots and broom to pick? Reid at last had to drag him off and set him on a lonely shore to practise on the different tones of sea and sky.

"Let's get away for a change," said George one day. "Let's go up Deeside. I'm sick of this drudgery. Surely one should paint only when one is inspired."

Rain had threatened all the morning. Before them stretched unbroken horizon.

"It's goin' to clear," said Reid, sucking his pipe.

"We're not talking of weather, but of Deeside. Just look at that monotonous line stretching out to Doomsday. I want more scenery."

"And a camera."

"You don't know the Highlands," said George, flushing. "Why, man, the colour is fine—big blue mountains, and purple where the heather is, and mists, and forests of fir. I want the 'steep frowning glories of dark Lochnagar.'"

"Hoots, man, ye've Byron on the brain. Better sit down at the Linn o' Dee, and paint cards for passin' tourists."

George hacked the sand.

"Look here, sonny," said the older man. "Ye're lookin' at it the wrong way round. Ye think that grand scenery makes the grand painter. But it's no like that. It's the grand painter that makes the grand picture, because he gets the heart of him on the canvas. D'ye know that the finest painters to-day are the Dutch, who live in flatter country than this? And d'ye know that our own greatest landscapes were painted in the lowlands of East Anglia? Man, if ye could only see John Crome's *Mousehold Heath* in the National Gallery, ye would understand the greatness of simplicity. You young chaps want to go

trampin' for miles lookin' for what is at yer door. Open yer eyes, man, dinna stretch yer legs. As for scenery, look at yon!"

The low-lying veil had lifted from the horizon, showing a great bank of clouds towering up in pale citron under the still uncovered sun. The sea, which up to now had sulked in dirty grey, shimmered in gold and emerald and amethyst. A hollow space of blue between the trailing skirts of rain-cloud and the great mass behind gave body to the whole.

"There's an old painter," continued Reid, "old in years but not in heart, who lives by a stretch of moor, lookin' away to the low hills in the distance. Ay, sonny, as great an artist as lives, but I don't think he ever painted the Highlands. What he does paint is the light, and the freshness of the sea, and the sweetness of spring, and little children—just the common things. As he stood one day at the foot of his garden and looked away over the heath, he thought of those beautiful words in *Lavengro*: 'Life is sweet, brother. . . . There's day and night, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon and stars, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath.' A wind on the heath—that is the subject taken by our grandest living painter after forty years of solid work."

"What's his name?"

"Never mind, but he's a grand man for skies. He minds me of Carlyle—a philosopher in paint. Just think of him sittin' there down in his garden, bringin' on to his canvas the sunlight—and there's a wind on the heath."

Reid had surely the heart of a poet, though he never confessed to rhyme. Just enough money to buy paints and food, for, though he could have sauced his meat with portraits, he lived on bread and landscape.

George saw his friend paint just one portrait, and that was worthy of his nature. They had come in ravenous when a knock alarmed them.

"Behear us!" cried Reid. "A buyer!"

Plates, cheese, bread and knives were hurled pell-mell into a handy cupboard. George rapidly turned over some

likely canvases to the light, while the artist himself, wriggling into his Sunday coat with his left hand, brushed his hair with his right.

Another imperious knock, and so an impressive welcome.

"Please, sir," said a small voice outside the door, "it's spring cleaning the morn's morn, and would the gentleman mind if mither wipes the floor?"

Reid dashed out, to return with the messenger on his shoulder. She was a fair-haired, ruddy-faced little girl of almost four, exceedingly demure, and gratified by her reception.

"What did mither say ye were to get for takin' the message?" he said, throning her on the table. "Was it a box o' chocolates, or were ye to get yer portrait painted?"

A smile lit up her face.

"Ma portit paintit," she said.

"A weel, we'll jist do it the noo," seizing his brushes.

"Eh, but," he said, pretending disappointment, "we hinna a canvas. How can we paint ye a portrait withoot a canvas?"

"Find a campas."

"The verra thing," said the artist, as if inspired. "Here, where's ma knife?"

He flourished over the floor, and cut a square out of the linoleum carpet. The little lady shrieked with excitement, and as she sat there bubbling over, Reid transferred her daintiness to colour. Oh, the life and laughter of it! Surely "Mither's" pride soon patched that floor.

Never could George forget one of his first walks with the artist to Old Machar, the beautiful Cathedral lying between King's College and Balgownie. It was still spring, and the light foliage of the earlier budding trees made the world so sweet and fresh. Behind the Cathedral is a narrow strip of cemetery, so enclosed that the sun can barely reach it. From this cool hermitage one looks over the Don to Seaton, the loveliest view in that delicious spot. So quiet and serene was the air that instinctively their voices dropped.

"Ay, sonny," said Reid, after a while, "this is indeed God's earth. If there is anywhere that I should like to lie at last, it would be here under this old shadow, no stone to mark me, just a bed of forget-me-not and evergreen. There's no such thing as a soul, sonny, but I think a body could lie in quiet here, under the trees, with the river runnin' down to the sea."

How exquisite the Old Town looked as they returned! Near the top of the Spital Brae they could see the Crown of King's, sleeping as it had slept for centuries, with gardens round it, and old memories. A little further were the twin grey spires of Old Machar, and then the hills beyond.

George after a while made quicker progress. As his eyes were opened more and more to the colour of the world, so flowered his happiness. Reid seldom praised him, only let him work on. The months passed on till October came round, and the east winds.

"Geordie," said Reid one day.

"Imphm?"

"I'm thinkin'," with clouds of smoke. "I'm thinkin'," he continued, "that it's time for us to part."

"Never!" cried George. "Whatever are ye hawering at?"

"I'm thinkin' ye've got to make the great choice."

"What choice?"

"There's no puttin' it off. The new session's commencin', and there's a grave responsibility upon me. Is it to be Art?"

George trembled a little as he answered.

"Do you think I'm no good? Do you want me to go back to my books? Is that fair, after all you've taught me? Perhaps I have not worked steadily enough——"

"No, no! Ye've done fine—especially these last two months—but it's like this."

He tapped the ashes out of his pipe against a sole inch-thick, and slowly thumbed it full again with bogie-roll.

"Ye're doin' fine, sonny, but ye're gettin' on too fast—jumpin' out of yer skin. There's more drawin' to face,

more drudgery. That's what I'm thinkin', and there's a grave responsibility upon me."

"Go on!"

"There's the session just commencin', and there's the world—the world and Art. Which is it to be? King's College and slow death, or the world and life? Books that'll suck the guts out of ye, or life and workin' from the life that'll make a man of ye? Aye, be Gum! a man of ye. That's yer choice—Guts or Greek."

There was a rift in the smoke.

"Michael Angelo, be Gum! Titian, be Gum!—what are books to them but mealy puddin'!"

He stamped out from the fog of his own furious smoking.

"I'm no mad," he said, "just thinkin'. It's London ye want, and seein' big things, and drawin' from the life and livin', and doin' it all by yerself. It's no good yer luggin' on to my apron-strings. I'm no the man to tie ye up or teach ye. Colour, if ye like—I know a bittie about colour—but there's more than that to learn. No, man, ye must go to London—London or Paris—and draw from the life. Ye must do it alone. Sink or swim."

"But what about Nature?"

"That's it," said the older man. "Nature—learned after infinite patience—command of form as well as mastery of colour. Yer eyes are opened now. I think ye'll no be spoiled by the schools."

George sighed. Was this companionship to end? Could he face the world by himself?

"I may as well tell you now," he said after a while. "I've sold all my books already."

"Never!" cried Reid. "Yer College books? Losh behear us! That's more 'n I'd ha' thought of you. But that settles it, and I'm glad. Ye've made up yer mind to be an artist, and an artist ye'll be—a fine artist, too, sonny," sympathetically patting George's shoulder. Then relapsing into still broader Doric, "Aye, man, ye're a' recht."

George flushed.

"Well," he said, "you know best."

The older man crossed to the window of the room and looked out. The leaves were falling, and already the world seemed desolate and bare. For a long time he stood there, until the light began to fail. Then as George rose and stood beside him, Reid turned round.

His face was stained with tears.

CHAPTER VIII

LONDON

I FEEL as if I were Odysseus starting on perilous adventures," said George, leaning out of the carriage window. Reid had come down to the station to see him off.

"Well, Odysseus did get home after all. Perhaps when you too get home, ye'll find as he did, the old dog will be there to welcome, old dog being Nathaniel Reid, artist."

"Stan' clear!" shouted the guard, whistling shrilly through his fingers.

"Good-bye, sonny. Good luck!"

"Good-bye."

A last shake of the hand, and George was off—into the unknown. Sitting back into his corner he swallowed lumps as he watched the familiar scenes slip gradually by. They were over the Dee now, and now they were at Cove—Muchalls—Stonehaven.

He was awakened from his reverie by a kick on the shins from a small boy, one of several playing on the seat beside him.

"Stop yer feet wobblin' aboot," said a man opposite, evidently the father, smacking his son sharply on the thigh.

A howl followed like clockwork, and for an hour there was a deluge of tears and broad Scots.

Relief came at Perth, when the prolific passenger got out, leaving George alone with a keen-faced Yankee in the opposite corner, also travelling from Aberdeen.

"Guess I could hang my coat on that man's ac-cent," twanged the latter.

George responded with a smile.

"You are from Aberdeen?"

A nod.

"Sleepiest town I ever struck. Waiter at the hotel asked me when I wanted my bath. 'Five o'clock,' I said. Gee! he nearly broke in two. 'Five p.m.?' he said. 'Five a.m.,' said I, 'and you won't smell my dollar till I get it.' Well, bet you I did your town before breakfast. I just took a pocketful of crackers over-night and hustled around. Guess I don't waste time over here. Six hours sleep, and I grab my food and hustle around. Wonderful old hut that at the foot of the big street—Market Cross you call it—think so?"

"Never noticed it," said George.

"Well, I declare! Been to sleep like the rest, I guess. And that mossy old pile in the old town—Queen's College—that's mighty fine. How many dollars is that worth? What, say don't know? Well I declare! But for real serviceable buildings, give me Smith's University on our side—ever heard of Smith?"

"Any relation to Jones?" said George.

"Guess you're pulling my leg, young fellow. Don't do it again. Guess if Smith's name was good enough for twenty million dollars it was good enough for an edoocational institoon. Know Glasgow? No shakes on Chicago. Whenever I see a noo building running up here, I think on Chicago. Guess they don't pray for rain in Glasgow. Would you believe me, I saw yesterday a Salvation Army process down Sauchiehall Street and every man, woman and child carried an umbrella!"

"Tickets!" said a guard sharply.

"Holy Moses! will you kindly take my ticket and keep it, Mr. Conductor," growled the American. "Never struck such a country. Guess I've worn out two vests showing tickets on your Goddam railways these two days."

"Blair Athole? Change here. Hurry up!"

"Well, I declare!" And the hustler shot out, leaving George alone.

The old saying of "Tak awa Aiberdeen an' twal' mile roun', an' whar are ye?" accurately represents the North

Eastern mind. George had never thought of his native town as a sort of rabbit-hutch, and yet—? He would soon see.

“Stop yer feet wobblin’ about!”

He too was only a restless boy. Fortunately he had no father now to tie him down. He could kick the shins of the world if he liked. Let the world look out!

Passengers came in and out between Carlisle and Euston. No one to disturb his dreams.

Reid had advised him to live in Chelsea, but where Chelsea was George had not the least idea. He did not wish to give away his ignorance, and therefore when the cabman asked “Where to?” said:

“An hotel, please—somewhere near the Crystal Palace.”

Jehu stared at him.

“’Oss is tired, sir. Suppose we say the British Museum?”

“Very well,” said George, wondering why the porter sniggered.

As they drove out of Euston he thrilled with pleasure. This, this was London!

Looking up at a street corner he saw the legend “Oxford Street.”

Wonderful name! Here was that “stony-hearted stepmother” that de Quincey had known. To-night it was thronged with passers-by, strange people from a new world.

Oxford Street! The word Oxford called back to him the hopes and ambitions of the life he had left behind. Up in that northern University the Principal had always held up to his students the hope that the best of them should one day enter the “arenas of the south”—his favourite phrase—where all true scholarship was nurtured. George had wondered if such should ever be his luck in the days before he had met Nathaniel Reid. It was not Oxford now with its classical calm that beckoned. It was this Oxford Street, this throng of men and women passing by, this stony-hearted stepmother, if you will, drinking the tears of the fatherless.

The drive seemed endless. It had already lasted over an hour, when at last the cab pulled up.

"Thought you would like a temperance 'otel," said the driver. "This one specially recommended by the Bishop of London and Dr. Barnardo. Take an old man's advice and stop 'ere. Crystal Palace is ten mile further on. Wouldn't get there till two in the morning."

"What's the fare?"

"Well, six bob's the legal, but you bein' a stranger and new to London, say five."

George thought that London cabbies were a much maligned race. Adding sixpence to the claim, he thanked him.

"Take my ticket," said the driver, touching his cap. "You get a map before you go out again, and see where you's a-going to. You won't find them all like me. I was once a stranger myself."

When George did get a map, he understood.

So it was that George arrived in London, not like the proverbial Scot with only sixpence in his pocket, but just as friendless. After chasing through Chelsea for a lodging, he chose an attic, on the principle that this was furthest from the drains. Reid had given him an introduction to a French artist now in England, but when George rang at the address he could get no answer. So for several times.

Reid had recommended him to go to the Slade School; but, as the masters there would not let him join the life-class till he had been through the antique, George cried off. He found that he could join an evening life-class at a school near Oxford Street without any such preliminary.

So far he had done just landscape, with still life on wet days. It was therefore with some shyness that he entered the school for his first attempt at the nude. The class was held in a sort of private house with the studio at the furthest end from the entrance on the ground floor. In the ante-room where men were taking off their coats some ancient casts struck attitudes, a lay figure sprawled about with absurd contortions, and an unfinished painting invited criticism from its easel.

In the studio itself the men were waiting idly for the

model. Most of them were of his own age, though a few were older hands. Then a young woman, rather badly dressed, hurried to a door beside the platform which evidently hid her dressing-room. In a few minutes she had slipped on to the platform, the pose was decided, and seats or standing easels were selected. George hardly dared to look at the model, but somehow found a seat near the right hand wall. It was the first time he had seen the earthly Venus, and the faults of earth came as a shock to one familiar with ideal renderings. The girl's face might have passed, but her breasts were spare and pendant, throwing an ugly shadow. The feet had warts with toes in-curling.

"Why do her breasts hang like that?" he whispered after a while to his neighbour, an oldish man with a bushy beard.

"She's been ill. But she sits well, and the general lines of her figure are good. If you don't like your place, change with me."

The change was made, and for an hour there was silence. Then some one called out "Time!" The model stretched herself, put on her wrap and disappeared.

To his surprise, George found that most of the other students had begun their drawings with a pretty face, only faintly suggested by the original. Some had planned a composition into which the model roughly fitted. One only, his neighbour, was drawing an actual study of the figure.

During the second hour, a youth in front talked loudly of some illustrated joke he had just got published. Then there was silence as the master entered.

He was a little man, with a bald head, and contented himself with correcting faults of proportion.

Over George's uncertain effort he hummed and ha'd a little.

"I think our left leg is too short," he said. "Also I should add an inch to our head."

So long as George had worked with Reid, Art had always

been something of the Goddess. Now, in this atmosphere of an insipid school, he learnt to know her as a many-headed dragon. Here there was only the cockney's eye for beauty—showy goods behind a counter. One man was for achieving fame as a poster artist and talked of the prices So-and-so got for his designs. Others were for illustration—one for horses, another for violent action, a third for ships, a fourth for costume—all, however, chiefly concerned for the money they could make, talking the shop of artistic hacks.

The model was not nude every evening. On alternate nights the figure was draped, and on these nights women students came to the class.

After a fortnight of this George came to the conclusion that he needed a more strenuous air and that he must attend day classes as well. Up to now he had spent his days at the National Gallery and seeing the sights of London. He therefore tried another school recommended by the neighbour with the bushy beard, St. Margaret's.

To his dismay he found the entrance hall at St. Margaret's alive with blue smocks and frizzled hair. He had had enough of the lady artist at the former school and almost fled. Fortunately a notice on the door referred to a life-class for male students. Plucking up courage, he asked to see the secretary. That gentleman was out, so George left some sketches with a note expressing his desire to join the school.

Next day an answer came, that "though your drawing is very feeble, Mr. Garden Sheaf, the master, will admit you to the life-class if you pay your fees."

The entrance hall at St. Margaret's was clear on his second appearance. An old man like Don Quixote accepted his fees and conducted him to the studio. Only three besides himself were present, in no particular hurry to begin. When at last they started, George took a vacant seat, only to be told to move ten minutes later by a late-comer whose place he had appropriated. By this time others came dropping in, and it was not till after the first rest that George at last found a vacant position beside a bony student

of the name of Shanks, who in a brief ten minutes had roughed in a vigorous suggestion of the pose.

The model had a charming figure, and by the end of the second hour George had forgotten the earlier annoyances. *Badinage* and the amiable fooling of two lazy wits did at times disturb him, but he soon got used to these. There was an hour for lunch at midday, followed by two hours' work in the afternoon. To George's surprise no master came all day.

Most of his fellow-students drew in charcoal, but some were painting. During the intervals they sauntered round looking at each other's work. They were much more experienced draughtsmen than George, so his production did not delay them. After all, he was glad that Garden Sheaf had stayed away.

Next day brought another model in costume. Again he sat with Shanks.

"You don't paint," he ventured to his neighbour.

"Can't afford materials. May I borrow some of your bread?"

Just then the door opened and an "arty" individual with pointed golden beard stalked in, folding his arms in an attitude behind the stool nearest the door. Clearly it was Garden Sheaf, for every one bent down to work. George had not long to wait. Garden Sheaf disposed of the whole room in ten minutes, a sneer and two rough charcoal suggestions sufficing for the new student. Sighs of relief followed the visitor's exit.

"Is this all the teaching we get?" asked George of Shanks.

"Quite enough," was the reply. "It's only women that can't learn by themselves."

After a few minutes George ventured further.

"I saw lots of women outside. Are they no good?"

"In one way they are. They pay for us."

"What do you mean?"

"This part of the school does not pay its way. It's the women that bring the profit. Garden Sheaf has his uses.

Women adore him and flock here, and so we get a cheap studio—precious darlings.”

Shanks turned abruptly away.

At three o'clock George gave up disheartened and went to the National Gallery. Then for the first time a great despair came over him. He realised the steepness of the road that he must travel. He remembered the contempt with which the men at St. Margaret's passed his drawing, and then that cutting sneer from Garden Sheaf. Now that he looked at masterpieces such as Dürer's portrait of his father, he saw how infinitely they overtopped him. How could his feeble fingers ever reach such accuracy and yet breadth of touch, how could his eyes refine to such keen and yet romantic vision? He was alone, one solitary beginner fighting his way unaided to expression.

A brusque official urged him into the street.

Pausing on the steps, he shuddered in the chill grey light that shrouded Trafalgar Square. Nelson's figure was obscured by mist and the lions might have been sphinxes guarding the inscrutable secret of the world. Meanwhile the human river hurried along, careless except of motion.

“Cheer up, my lad,” said a recruiting sergeant, scenting a victim, “we'll soon be dead, so why not die for your country? Fine times for the likes of you—smart uniform, good victuals, beer and baccy. The Royal——”

George hurried away from the enchanter and wandered till hunger drove him home. In his lodging he sat moodily over his fire. The note from the secretary of St. Margaret's caught his eye: “Though your drawing is very feeble, Mr. Garden Sheaf, the master, will admit you to the life-class if you pay your fees.”

Fees! That was all they wanted. How many thousands passed through these schools out of and into the inane. What matter if they paid their fees?

Damn them all! He would spite them yet. They were only Englishmen after all.

The landlady laid supper.

“Anything else, sir?” she smirked at the door.

George lifted the cover. It was his favourite dish.

"Thank God for food!" he muttered, and set to. "Make me some strong coffee," he said to the woman who stood watching him.

All through that night he copied drawings by Andrea del Sarto. As he drew, the events of the last year paraded through his sub-conscious mind. He remembered—how long ago it seemed!—his first day at College and the round of lectures, library and lodgings. The face of Adam Grant shaped itself into the face he drew, and with a shudder he put aside the recollection of that echo of Greek tragedy in MacGillivray's Court. Then came the face of the Lady Might-Have-Been—should he ever see that face again? This was a more misty face—he was less observant then. Then came Reid—glorious fellow and true friend.

Ever and anon the motto of Marischal College underran his thoughts: "They Haif Said. Quhat Saye They? Lat Yame Saye." A grim smile flickered on his lips as he thought of Garden Sheaf and his criticism. At dawn the tramp of workmen startled him.

"Damn them all!" he repeated as he slipped into bed. "I'll spite them yet."

At the end of a month George decided to stay on at St. Margaret's. He had learned to like that atmosphere of art, inches thick in dust. Still there was no one whom he could call friend. Shanks played hermit in an impenetrable shell, all the harder for his poverty. And yet George found his fellows here more sympathetic than the undergraduates at Aberdeen. St. Margaret's was singularly free from the ambition which aims at pot-boiling or Academical success. Some were of course mere amateurs, spending their awkward age in surroundings more congenial than home or an office, but even these had ideals of a sort.

On the whole, they were a decent set of fellows, comprising not a little talent, although none betrayed superlative genius. The school had known more vigorous days

and still retained some of its tradition. Occasionally an old student would rejoin them and electrify the idlers into more work and less talk. Yet some of the idlers were the cleverest of all. They required only the pinch of poverty to work their names into exhibition catalogues.

George envied their facility. It was their skill that made them idle. In two hours they drew something that passed muster while he still laboriously shaped and re-shaped. They had the tricks of bread and charcoal at their finger-ends, while he still struggled with the problems of construction.

The neighbouring women students were the subject of amused indifference. They too must have had some clever hands, but the soul was the soul of imitation. In the monthly competition the prize for figure drawing usually fell to a woman, not because she was a better artist, but because she used the formula of Garden Sheaf, a heavy outline round the figure. The men all scorned the trick; and once when Shanks obtained first-prize by sending in a drawing done this way, he had to explain that he did it to pay the rent.

George worked on in dogged silence, taking his only relaxation in the gallery of an occasional theatre. On the nights when the Art Library at South Kensington was open he might usually be seen at seat 79. It was not strange that in such a friendless life he turned at times to his old companionship in books. The truth to nature that he loved had in a way been preluded by those old days with Balzac. Now he traced the human fact in Art, the lives of his new heroes: Albrecht Dürer, that Lutheran so passionate for truth; Rembrandt, whose vision of the Light in Darkness shone through unhappy years; Constable, with breezes and bloom and freshness bedewing every page he penned to Leslie; Millet most of all, with his epic of the ground gloriously unfolded not alone in picture but also in imperishable prose. How many a passage he learned by heart in French and in translation from those letters to Sensier! One he copied out and fastened to the wall above

his head so that he could see it every day when he awoke:

"Some tell me that I deny the charms of the country. I find much more than charms. I find infinite glories. I see as well as they do the little flowers of which Christ said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. I see the halos of dandelions, and the sun which spreads out beyond the world its glory in the clouds. But I see as well, in the plain, the steaming horses at work, and in a rocky place a man, all worn out, whose 'han' you have heard since morning, and who tries to straighten himself for a moment and breathe. The drama is surrounded with beauty."

Those who had known him only a year before would have been astonished at the pace George swept into maturity. At King's College he had been a mere boy, unstable because of aimless discontent. The steady concentration and discipline required by his new life had begun the change which London had continued. Provincial soil encourages an easy growth. The Great City jostles you into self-reliance, or crowds and starves you out.

George, always neat in his dress, became something of a dandy. It struck him that it was more sanitary, if less artistic, to differ in costume from a dealer in old clothes. Unconscious of his uppishness, he conveyed the impression that he was a man of means. This no doubt alienated the very men whom he wished to make his friends, for the out at elbows is mostly proud and the others who wore clean shirts came to the school chiefly as a pastime. Sometimes he would feel hurt when a fellow-student such as Shanks evaded invitations, never thinking that clothes could be a barrier. Had he been more self-conscious, he might have realised the contrast in the looking-glass of any shop window. As it was, he thought he must be despised for his work.

The Woman did not appear. She might have made him more human. For sex surges in the artist, however deeply

submerged. The under-swirl may not run along the usual channel, but still it is there. To change the metaphor, the flower is very beautiful but it still has roots in earth, unnoticed perhaps and forgotten, but sucking life amid the worms for mysterious and dreamy fragrance. The thoughts and words of the studio are clean, infinitely cleaner than in careers where womanhood is veiled; but sex knows no impregnable Gibraltar. George noticed this himself. The life-class was half empty when the model was a man.

He was curious to learn the histories and types of mind of the girls who came to pose. During the intervals of rest, conversation shuttlecocked from stool to platform amusing and instructive. Disillusion came frequently enough. One did not need to listen long before one found that angel faces often hid a Cockney tongue.

So careful were the models that he never had the courage to suggest a supper or a theatre, though he knew that others found this possible. Here again his handicap was his appearance, his unconscious sneer, or perhaps the dandyism which so often signals danger. Living as she does by health and by her figure, an artists' model is inclined by circumstance to take few risks, and those that temper monotony with indiscretion soon find themselves abyssed. Neither better nor worse than the shop-girls and domestic servants who would shun their acquaintance, they face their precarious career with an armour forged by caution.

There are of course artists who snatch at unfair chances, but nature has been curiously just to the human instinct, and those who come most in contact with the nude are those who are content to realise only its beauty. Had Plato been familiar with artist life, he might have cited the indecent painter as the grossest instance of "the lie in the soul."

Moral health grows with knowledge. No longer at the mercy of blind sensuous enjoyment, the artist finds poor pleasure in crude physical delights.

Never could George forget his shock when he discovered his landlady gloating over studies which to her mind were

gloriously indecent. Needless to say he changed his attic and henceforth locked up his portfolios.

He was thus able to thread the perilous life of London with as much safety as sincere religion or a single-hearted love could have effected. £200 a year is key to the gates of hell unless there is some saving principle. But in George the sensuous sway of hips provoked no physical desire, only thoughts of construction and of form.

Yet he was still a man. Circumstances might still arise under which the old Adam would out.

CHAPTER IX

HOMESICK

IN the meantime the new Adam walked his garden in another way. Every day when he awoke he read the quotation from Millet which he had pinned up at the end of his bed and as the days dawned earlier with the coming of summer, George felt a tugging at the heart and the salt tang of the sea in his nostrils and the fragrance of the heather.

Urgent grew the call of the North, but what would Reid say—Reid who had sent him South? The schools would close very shortly—surely this was excuse enough.

“MY DEAR MENTOR,” his letter ran.

“This is the third time of writing to you since I came to London—once at Christmas, once at Easter and once now, without so far any reply. Have you not been well, or is it only that you can’t be bothered to write? If only we could meet I could show you what I have been doing—sketch books full and ever so many sheets of charcoal drawings, with a few shots at colour which, however, I have let be as you wished it so. You were right. I am glad you drove me to this drudgery of drawing. It will pay in the end.

“But honestly, I want to see you again—you and some of the old places. I never knew before how fond I was of Scotland. You remember the old Emigrant’s poem:—

“From the lone sheiling and the misty island,
Mountains divide us and a world of seas,
But still the blood runs true, the heart is Highland
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.”

“I am not Highland nor ever saw the Hebrides, but I am

fair sick for a sight of the links and the heather and the old Spider Crown at King's.

"The school closes next week. I have heard of a farm house in the Chilterns, but why not Aberdeen?"

The answer came:

"MY DEAR GEORDIE,—

"Haste ye back again. I've a damned poor fist for writing and a still damner fist for spelling, besides which it was best for you to gang your ain gait and no' be running back every while, besides which I saved two penny stamps, equal to four bawbees, by not posting my letter till now, which up here means a good lang strip of bogie roll for the old man to smoke. Now whereas man and particularly the artist is born to the cultivation of his own soul, which he accomplishes at a mature age most satisfactorily with the aid of a clay pipe, the said bogie roll is better for the world at large than any contribution to an ungrateful Post Office.

"That you have made progress I can well believe without being Elijah and the Prophets, and am right glad to think you are homesick for dear old Scotland, whose heather is to me worth more than the lilies of the Madonna and whose porridge would have helped the Children of Israel a damned sight more than manna, particularly when taken with a sprinkling of raw oatmeal on the top, with the milk in a separate mug. As to the Spider Crown at King's, beware lest you be the fly which buzzes back in spite of all warnings into the fatal web of Greek, Latin and other such cemeteries of human thought. Beware the grey-bearded Professors of cabbalistic learning who ensnare the innocent youth into their musty libraries, sucking out the joy of life and rapture of the open air, and leaving only wizened, bloodless shells with spectacles instead of eyes, tied hand and foot to their grey and ghostly prison.

"No, sonny, no Spider Crown for you just yet awhile, but the sea you may have and welcome. I am this day moving my somewhat rheumatic self to the ancient borough of Stonehaven, where it would be a pretty middling artist that couldna paint his nut off—seascapes, landscapes, boats,

figures, faces, whatever you have a mind to, with fish for brain food. The salt sea winds will blow the London fog out of your lungs and kick your liverish low-in-tone sky high sky blue. You will forget the popinjay parade of Piccadilly with its peroxide and patchouli. I myself have been saving up a clean collar for this summer holiday, and though I hate this changing of shirts once a month or so, two shirts will I bring out of consideration for my London friend.

“Meet me this day next week at the Inn—I forget its name—close to the Town Hall in Market Square. By that time I shall have found the right kind of digs.

“So long,

“NATHANIEL REID.”

At the inn they met, and warm was the greeting, Reid being just as glad to see his protégé as George was to be with his Mentor. The world seemed good as they walked across Market Square to the rooms selected. It was the same old Nathaniel Reid, with the same old bushy beard, a trifle thinner in the face perhaps, with deeper crowsfeet round the eyes, and a stiffer gait, showing that the rheumatism was no fancy.

The box came from the station and George was eager to unstrap it.

“Wait, sonny, wait till we have our tea,” said the old fellow. “Life is short but Art is eternal. Didna ye see them scones? Man, ye’ll no get scones like yon in London. And for breakfast the morn’s morn there’s baps—with flour all over them—did iver ye see a bap in London? And they charge ye tuppence there for pastries that are two a penny in Stonehaven. Losh, man! d’ye no smell the finnan haddie? She’s cooking them the now for you and me. Haud a wee! Your sketches can wait. There’s the cups and saucers rattlin’, and the girl’s bringin’ up the tray. No, it’s the old buddy hersel’.

“Thank ye, ma’am, it’s a fine day the day, and we’re just perishing for our teas. Aye, ma’am, this being the occasion of great rejoicing and the return of the prodigal

son we shall slay the fatted calf, or in other words have jam. Ay, ay, strawberry will do, and dinna stint the butter. Some mair hot water—each o' us drinks four cups—if there's anything more, we'll just ring the bell. Now, sonny, peg into what's before you. Forget those ten-course London dinners concocted by French poisoners. Here an honest Scotswoman covers the good clean tablecloth with wholesome fare, and may the Lord give us strength to digest these Thy mercies!"

After the attenuated niceties of London talk, Reid's rough Scots tongue came like one of the old refreshing North-easters over the links at Balgownie, blowing health into body and soul. The burr of the "r" and the broad vowels vibrated with answering thrill in George's ears and heart.

"Now pass the salt and tell me about Sodom and Gomorrah," continued Reid. "Did ye see Ravin, the French artist to whom I gave you a letter? No? Well, that's funny! I hope he's no done anything foolish. He would have helped you whiles. And the same old pictures, I suppose, in the National Gallery? Sure's fate, ye had regular debauches on Old Chrome and John Constable—ooch ay! these chaps could paint—to hell with your Dutch masters, all except Vermeer van Delft. Well now, who's your favourite? Have you gone daft on Velazquez, or do you take fits with Turner? Have you—what's that you're saying?"

"Pass the jam, please. Art can wait," said George.

Reid, paid back in his own coin, roared with laughter.

"You're no such a gowk after all," he said. "All right, sonny, fortify yersel' while there's time against the attacks to come."

When they got down to the sketches, Reid showed himself a keen, sympathetic critic, merciless on any careless drawing, but appreciative of the genuine progress made. He saw at once that George had worked hard and well.

"Nothin' here to greit about," he said when they had turned over the last sketch. "George Grange, ye've gone

up top, and though it's no but a class of one, it does me credit."

It was worth while having slaved away all the winter to hear this from his old Mentor. George went to bed after the happiest day of his life.

Next morning and for the next week they were up early, getting the atmosphere of the place. Sixteen miles or so south of Aberdeen, Stonehaven had a somewhat different character from its big, busy neighbour. The East winds kept blowing roses from the North Sea into the cheeks of bonny lasses, and there were roses too in the gardens, rambling roses climbing up the walls built into hill sides so as to snare the sun, yet keep out the fiercer storms. The town climbed from the harbour up the slopes until you came to Beefy Castle, the eyrie of a worthy butcher. Two burns, the Cowie and the Carron, mingled their common streams just before they joined the sea, which a high bank of stony beach held back from the lower streets of the new town.

The original "Stanehive" was a fishing town nestling under red-tiled roofs. Its harbour had a sleepy air except when the boats came in with their haul of fish. Then indeed was a busy scene on the quays: women and girls out slitting and salting the fish for a voracious market, working far into the night under flaring lamps. A tannery and a brewery added perceptible strength to the aroma of the lower town, but on the upper slopes the air was the air of the salt, salt sea. Yet only a few miles inland the sea was a sea of oats and barley, and the Slug Road climbed up over a ridge of Cairn-mon-Earn fragrant with peat and heather, and then down into Banchory and the valley of the Dee.

Along the cliffs to the north and south was a path fringed with blue-bells and whins and cornflower and marguerites and sometimes wild geraniums. The path to the south led to Dunnottar Castle, a famous keep built a thousand years ago on a rocky promontory, which every assault save that of Cromwell's Ironsides had found impregnable. Two miles further on was Fowl's Heuch, rising from the deep sea

many sheer hundred feet, wherein millions of sea-gulls nested and flew out like a whirl of snowdrift if any disturbing human fired a shot or otherwise roused their clamorous alarms. Stonehaven's harbour snuggled under Downie Point, whereas an open beach stretched north half a mile or so to the tiny harbour of Cowie, near which the low tide uncovered rocks slippery with seaweed. Mysterious pools enticed the children to search for starfish and anemones and soft shelled crabs. On the pier at Cowie harbour, small boys fished for the poodlies that swam in millions through the clear water. Like the old "Stanehive," Cowie village had its red-tiled roofs, warm against the cool green sward of Cowie braes or the grey slaty sea.

The Cowie burn had its bed alongside the beach, then turned up inland past the tennis greens where it yielded an astonishing supply of flounders to the summer visitors, then half a mile or so to St. Kieran's Well with rocky shores under the railway viaduct and so into a glen of pools forbidden except to privileged rods. A pretty, sparkling stream in sunny weather, it was in furious spate after rain with dull brown flood wherein swam many sturdy trout.

The summer visitors possessed the newer town with its Seaview Cottages and Highcliff Houses. These visitors were not alone from Aberdeen, but came to this bracing East from the relaxing West Coast. If the sun shone bright on any morning, down they trooped in their straw hats and tam-o'-shanters to the beach, to swim and paddle and gossip in their family groups. Low tide yielded a sandy strip below the pebbles, and then indeed it was pail and spade for the little ones.

From the beach at eleven o'clock or thereabouts, they came back a hundred yards to the tennis greens where an autocratic, bearded John permitted the younger folk to play more or less vigorous games while the fathers and uncles and grandfathers fought their battles with bowls. The family gatherings were continued on the grassy banks beside the courts, and light flirtations carried on from day to day, till the hour sacred to food. So they trooped to the

midday meal. On hot days there was a siesta followed by more tennis till tea, after which the townfolk shared the courts. Twilight was an hour for walks, or hide and seek among the boats at Cowie, or sing-songs along the open road.

Through a second cousinship of Reid's, George touched the fringe of one of these groups, and though he soon was too busy to join the fun by day, he was caught in some of the evening rambles. The second cousin was the wife of a Dr. Middleton, an elderly Glasgow physician, whom she had blessed with two attractive grown-up daughters. Dr. Middleton was a genial soul whose grey beard and blue serge suit covered a stoutish face and figure. Musical himself without the capacity to play, he adored his daughters, both of whom were expert pianists. Without neglecting his wife his heart was with the younger folk, and on these evening rambles he and his wide-awake had his Kate and Elsie on each arm, much to the disgust of swains who thought this too much father.

George, on such walks, escorted Mrs. Middleton, whose motherly heart caressed his sensitive soul. Her hair just turning grey, her plump face with humorous half-closed eyes, her never failing smile, her voice warm with husky timbre, her fondness for her own folk and yet her sympathy for himself the stranger, made an irresistible appeal to George, humanized him, roused to new life his stunted affections. She drew him out as they walked along, laughing him out of his conceits yet fanning his ambition, quoting Burns against his Browning, and George Macdonald against his Meredith. Scots to the very heart of her, she loved a wayside thistle more than the gayest gaillardia; like many another Scot she had a philosophic turn of mind, tempering her faith in the Shorter Catechism with an interest in Higher Criticism, which as it happened found a vigorous exponent in the local Free Church minister.

She herself and her own folk were from Aberdeen, and she knew George's mother better than he had ever known her. They had been girls at the same school, and though

marriage had divided them, Mrs. Middleton could well imagine the careless, showy woman into which Mrs. Grange had grown. With no son of her own and with her daughters grown up, she rejoiced in this lad who never had known what a mother could be.

On Sunday afternoon she made him come round with Nathaniel Reid and bring the sketches they had made during the week. It was really an excuse to get Nathaniel and George to go to church with the family in the evening, for Mrs. Middleton was anxious to have all her friends converted to the up-to-date interpretation of the old religion. George endured the sermon because of the evening walk that followed—an hour of sympathetic communion with this warm-hearted woman.

CHAPTER X

MRS. MIDDLETON'S PORTRAIT

WITH a weather-beaten fisherman as model, Reid gave George some lessons in portraiture, which were a revelation after his winter of undirected schooling. Yet that schooling had not been wasted, for it enabled him to appreciate the methods of which Reid was a master. They had a meaning for him now and were not merely tricks to imitate.

When Mrs. Middleton saw their canvases, she asked whether she might be their next model, promising to sit as still and speak as little as any one could expect from a woman of fifty-five, and also that the portraits should remain a state secret unless they were admittedly good, in which case they would be purchased by the doctor as a birthday present for himself, and in any case the artists would be rewarded from day to day by oatcakes of her own toasting with apple jelly of her own making, than which both George and Nathaniel knew there was nothing more delicious.

Also she would wear her sunbonnet with briar roses tied with a ribbon of pale green, and wear the lilac dress with silver buckle at her neck which Dr. Middleton had given her to wear at the garden parties of the British Association, where she made such a sensation that a French professor of Psychic Biogenesis asked her to elope with him, and a South American Entomologist, who had travelled half round the world to give an address on the habits of Patagonian Centipedes forgot to appear at the meeting, for which he had been advertised, owing to his preoccupation in holding her hand under the pretence of telling her fortune.

Reid found a background of hollyhock and larkspur in a secluded garden deep-set in a hill just like a quarry, with roses on the wall and rosepillars in the borders—a garden sweet as Mrs. Middleton herself. Wallflowers, London pride, dusty miller, columbines and double daisies were grouped in masses of soft colour.

Here at a time when the rest of the family fancied her at her siesta she smiled on them, and with barely a movement of her arched lips rippled along in disquisitions on the comparative merits of frankness and flattery, of beauty and utility, of cleverness and character, speaking from ripe experience and a sense of humour which lit up her face with a subtlety such as baffled the skill of even Nathaniel Reid.

“Ye’re just doing it to spite us,” he said, after the third time of sitting and of scraping out. “Ye might as well ask an elephant to play ‘I dropped a letter to my love’ wi’ a grasshopper as expect us to catch up wi’ the twinkle of yer half-hidden eye. No, Mistress Middleton, we can paint yer purple an’ fine linen and take a coco-nut shy at yer not impossible features, but to reproduce a young heart in a middle-aged face and a deep philosophy in smooth red cheeks would have given Titian a sair head and made Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci feel like fleas trying to incubate a crocodile’s egg. Put on yer best Sunday expression for sixteen minutes and thirty-two seconds and we could give you something that the minister could differentiate from a well cooked haggis, but dinna expect us to reproduce the heavenly choirs on a penny whistle.”

“The mistake you make,” she answered, “is to think of a woman as flesh and blood, whereas she is just a bundle of nerves answering to a thousand waves of spiritual influence every minute, as any modern philosopher will tell you. You think you are painting just so much light and shadow and colour, whereas the Me that is Me is not a thing but a thought, or rather several hundred thousand billion thoughts whirling for a moment or so in a lilac dress under a briar rose sunbonnet.”

“It makes me think of yon spider climbing up——”

"Where? Where?" she exclaimed, jumping up in an agitation and shaking her dress.

"Sit ye doon, sit ye doon," said Reid, laughing heartily. "It's no a real spider I'm tellin' ye aboot but the fairy tale spider of Robert the Bruce that he watched climbing up inside the cave. Seven times it fell before it reached the top. Ye mind the story we learned at school, and how Bruce took heart and went out to fight again."

"Oh, *that* spider!"

Somewhat ashamed, Mrs. Middleton collected herself and very soon was the same old smile.

"I don't mind mice," she explained, "but spiders—ugh!"

"Was that flesh and blood, or was that one of yer billion thoughts that made ye jump like yon?" said Reid chaffingly. "Has another Professor of Physiological Metaphysics been stuffin' yer head wi' yon daft notion at garden parties? Next time he tells yon tale about a billion thoughts, just try him wi' yon spider, sayin' ye saw it disappearin' under his collar, and then if ye don't see him skitin' round the corner to change his shirt, my name's no Nathaniel Reid. No, no—stick to yer flesh and blood and be glad ye've got it. The highfalutin abstractions of overworked brains in the bald head of an atrophied anatomy otherwise named Professor, bear as much resemblance to actual fact as a nightmare to love's young dream."

"My dear Nathaniel, why this outburst of fury against the unfortunate Professor? Perhaps even a Professor has flesh and blood."

"Not if he can help it. Not if he can squirt ink into his atrophied arteries, and exchange his flesh for parchment. The worst kind of all comes from Germany, and goes about wi' a microscope in one hand and a mug of beer in the other, resurrectin' Old Masters that were best forgotten and blind to the livin' Art of to-day with its glory in the open air and delight in fresh colour. Unless the varnish has begun to grow yellow and made the picture a mouldy ruin that the original artist couldna recognise,

your Professor wouldna admit its existence as Art at all."

"Now," said Mrs. Middleton slyly, "we are coming to the flesh and blood. Some Art critic with the title of Professor——"

"Wait a bit," interrupted Reid, with a chuckle of triumph, "not so fast, not so fast—I've got ye this time, you and yer billion thoughts."

And sure enough, whether by accident or skill, at this fourth attempt he had caught something of her expression. George gave up his own splurge and watched the old man painting with intense rapidity the masses and planes, the greys and the translucent colours which together formed her picture. It was a masterful impression, and as it grew more and more vivid with each touch of the brush, George felt as excited as if he were doing it himself. Mrs. Middleton began to catch the infection.

"Remember that Eve also was inquisitive. Put a looking glass in front of me or let me see the portrait, or I shall explode."

"The older they get, the more vain they are," said the imperturbable Reid. "Trust the Eve of to-day to spoil yer best intentions. She snares the young innocent from the narrow path with her high heels and slender ankles neatly displayed on the broad road. Reaching the age of worldly wisdom, otherwise known as thirty, she places her sun parasol at an angle of forty-five degrees so that the jewelled bracelet on her shapely wrist may catch the eye of her elderly admirer and entice him to match it with a pair and so ingratiate himself into her well-worn affections. She holds him or his successor till she is nearing forty, when on the day before her birthday she leads her deluded captor to the altar. From that day in the intervals of buying expensive hats and gowns she subjects him to an inquisition into his past life and future movements until the puir body seeks refuge in a more or less natural death—*Requiescat in pace*. The plate will now be handed round for the collection, which is on behalf of the tombstone fund for the late lamented Adam."

"If it were not for the Modern Eve," retorted Mrs. Middleton, "the poorhouse would very soon be known as the Artist's Home. The desire to be thought beautiful has buttered the bread of many a painter. Just imagine what Art would be to-day if the only commissions were given for pictures of apple trees and unsophisticated snakes."

"Accept my contrite neck as footstool," said the old man, laying down his palette. "May Eve live a thousand years to contrive new vanities for our inspiration and source of income. May her wrinkles grow beautiful in the eyes of the Art Patron and her scant grey hairs——"

"Time for tea! And I see you've finished," said Mrs. Middleton, rising with a laugh. Then standing in front of her portrait—"Goodness, gracious! so that is me! Nathaniel, you have been in Ireland since I last saw you, kissing the blarney stone. Can you blame the modern Eve for running to the milliner when even a second cousin, old enough to know better, makes her think herself twice as good looking as she really is?"

"Twice as good looking, perhaps," said Reid, with a bow, "but never twice as good. I didna kiss the blarney stone, but wished a wish at St. Kieran's Well—the said wish being that my rough rheumatic hand might depict for posterity something of the charm of a good Scotswoman, whose sweet character and human kindness will long remain a fragrant memory to those who have been privileged to see her bloom."

"Thank you, Nathaniel," she said with sudden tears in her eyes. Then with a laugh again, "But what you are really thinking of is her toasted cakes and apple jelly."

After tea they went for a walk towards Dunnottar Castle along the cliffs, Dr. Middleton with Nathaniel Reid, Kate and Elsie with George and their mother. They were thinking and talking of the portrait, for the secret had been revealed and was as wonderful as a new baby.

"There is one thing I'm glad about," said Mrs. Middleton to George, "and that is that you were not jealous."

"Jealous of what?"

"Why, that Nathaniel's portrait was better than yours."

"Jealous," he said laughing. "How could I think of such a thing. No artist who is an artist can ever be jealous of anything good. It can only give him pleasure to see a beautiful painting. I might as well be jealous of—of that moon up there in the clouds. Besides, Mr. Reid is my master and I am only a beginner."

"Ah, but Nathaniel thinks a lot of you. He has told me so many times, though surely he told me not to say so—thought perhaps you were conceited enough already. He says you have such instinct for colour and composition, and what he likes best of all is that you are sincere. You worked well during the winter. He is proud to have such a pupil."

"It's nice to hear all that," said George, "but if I had known what a long row there is to hoe before an artist can do anything worth while, I might never have started out."

"Is anything worth while doing if it is easy?" she answered. "Surely the greatest pleasure lies in the overcoming of difficulties. These difficulties arouse one's energy, and it is in this energy that one feels the joy of living."

"Most people think that happiness consists in having lots of friends."

"Yes, but friends fly off into other circles—the girls marry, and the men become absorbed in their own work and their own homes. Some of them die. If you don't learn to rely on yourself, your friendships are a poor support. Learn to do something well and with all your heart and then you will find happiness, friends or no friends."

"I wish I had known you sooner," said George, "and that you were not going away so soon. You have been so good to me and I like talking to you so much. I wish you lived in London instead of Glasgow."

"If I did, it would not be the same as here," she answered. "We are on holiday here, but the wife of a fashionable doctor in a large city has not much time on her hands. It is one whirl from morning to night, and if it were not for the rest I get here, I should break down. We

lead a double life, many of us, and if you saw me in the city, you would not recognise the easy-going old lady who sat to you for her portrait or sauntered along this path on the cliffs. This is our holiday, but in the city we live strenuous lives. So too you will find after we are gone that sleepy old Stonehaven does not live merely by her summer visitors. These fishermen down there have a hard, hard life. Look at the white caps there on the sea. It was clear and calm an hour ago, but at any moment some fierce storm may sweep up."

"I used to think of that," said George, "when I was painting that old fisherman—you saw our canvases. The lines on his face told of struggles for life on stormy nights. The old man did not speak much about them, but one day I found him on the beach mending nets. He had his daughter with him, married to a fisherman like himself, with a baby in her arms. She was sitting in the pebbles near by, crooning an old lullaby—do you know it?—the melody is one of the loveliest I ever heard. The words begin:

"'Oh can ye sew cushions and can ye sew sheets,
And can ye sing ballaloo gin the bairnie greits.'

She was rocking the baby to sleep in her arms, and I never heard anything so sad as when she came to the words:

"Sing ballaloo, lammie,
Sing ballaloo, dear,
Does wee lammie ken
That its daddie's no here?
Ye're rockin' fu' sweetly
On mammie's warm knee,
But daddie's a-rockin'
Upon the saut sea.'

It just brought the tears to my eyes. And then came the refrain:

"'Heigh O, heugh O, what'll I do wi' ye?
Black's the life that I lead wi' ye.

Many o' ye, little to gie ye,
Heigh O, heugh O, what'll I do wi' ye?"

"It's always been the same," said Mrs. Middleton. "That's why the old Scots songs have such a sad note running through them. That sea we are looking at is the same wild sea Sir Patrick Spens sailed on 'to Norroway o'er the foam'—you know the old ballad—I always think of it when I walk on this path along the cliffs and look away over to the sky line. You know it, don't you?"

"By heart," said George.

"Say it over."

"It's the end part I like the best:

"They hadna sail'd a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
Till loud and boisterous grew the wind
And gurlly grew the sea.
Oh laith, laith were our gude Scots lords
To weet their cork heel'd shoon,
But lang ere a' the play was play'd
They wat their hats abune.

Oh! lang, lang may the ladies sit
Wi' their fans intil their hand
Before they see Sir Patrick Spens
Come sailing to the land.
Half owre, half owre to Aberdour
'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens
Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.'"

"Ugh! It makes me shudder. If I believed in second sight, I would say there was some tragedy at hand. Let's think of something more cheerful. John," she called to Dr. Middleton, "say something to cheer us up. George and I are beginning to get morbid."

"Look at that moon," said Dr. Middleton, turning back and pointing with his stick. "In after years we shall all remember this day by the harvest moon shining up there in solitary splendour and throwing its path of silver across the sea."

CHAPTER XI

THE CLIFFS AT DUNNOTTAR

THIS simple pastoral had lasted nearly two months without interruption except for rainy days. Then the Middletons went back to Glasgow and the summer visitors thinned down to a barely perceptible strip upon the beach. The days grew shorter and the nights more chill. Yet the touch of autumn in the leaves made this country world if anything more beautiful, and George realised with a pang he must soon leave for the South.

The failure of his Mrs. Middleton's portrait had driven him back to landscape. Each day he carried his easel to Dunnottar Castle, which with its bold ruins based on wave-beaten crags made an imaginative subject. The glamour of romance added an additional charm to the scene, for the keep itself was said to be a thousand years old and the later castle dated back five centuries to William Keith, Great Marischal of Scotland, whose family stronghold it remained.

In Cromwell's time it safeguarded the Scottish regalia, then in the days of the Restoration it was a Covenanter's prison, many a sad tale being told of its dark dungeons. For nearly two hundred years it had lain dismantled, but the builders of these old days built well and its weather-beaten stones still defied the elements. It seemed a visible embodiment of that motto of the Earls Marischal which George in heart had taken for his own: "They haif said. Quhat saye they? Lat yame saye."

Reid went with George to study cloud effects and so the hours sped in good company. The picture shaped up well

and George began to feel a growing confidence and decision. They naturally talked of future plans.

"Shall I come back again here next summer?" he asked.

"Maybe yes and maybe no," said Reid. "If ye take an old fellow's advice, it'll be no. Cut loose from the apron-strings and rin along by yersel'. Go to yon farm in the Chilterns and paint some other kind of landscapes. Ye'll be apt to get into a few slick tricks if ye paint always the same kind—just *chic* instead of real drawing and real study. Besides, there's no sayin' that the old man will be here next year. I've had my warnin's of late, sonny, and I'm no long for this world. The end may come soon or it may keep off for a while, but it's comin', sure's fate. So I want ye to learn to stand on yer ain feet."

"But you don't seem to have many more friends than I have. Can I come up to be near you in case you were sick?"

"That's a kind thought, but it's no use. The doctor says that when it does come, it will come sudden. Pouf! and the light's out. I'm no greitin'. There's always been plenty to do, and very little pain."

Once or twice on their way back to the town they passed a young woman whose face George seemed to remember but could not locate. She was high-heeled and over-dressed and her hair jarred with her complexion.

"Yon town bird does not look for country birds out here," said Reid, looking back at her after the third time of meeting. "I dinna mind seein' her at the tennis green either, nor yet on the beach. My, yon's a dreary place now."

Very soon it began to rain, and later in the evening George solved the mystery of the lady of the cliff. Just before closing time they repaired to the inn for a "Deoch an' Doris," or nightcap. Behind the bar she was handing out drinks—the same remembered fair who had served George eighteen months before at the saloon in Aberdeen that day of the fight between Sands, the tailor's son, and

the English medical, Wolseley Greville. Now that he could see her closely the dark rings round her eyes were darker, and the temple and cheek bones were more pronounced. No rouge could bring the bloom to her faded face. She must be on the down grade, for this was a vulgar haunt compared to the fashionable bar in Aberdeen.

As he sipped his toddy, George recalled to mind the scene of which she had formed part, and the face of Wolseley Greville flashed back upon him. He remembered her "My, but ain't he got money!" covering a multitude of sins. He remembered the leering face and the limping figure in vivid contrast with the clean-cut, manly Sands. He shuddered as he thought of the Lady Might-Have-Been, poor little golden-haired Molly Arnold, the victim of this English cad. Then he recollected the story that this barmaid also had disappeared from Aberdeen at the same time as Wolseley Greville, supposedly in his company.

He had deserted her, no doubt, after he had had his pleasure, and she was back at her old job rather the worse for wear. Yes, it was the same girl—the same voice—the same turn of the hand.

The face of Wolseley Greville haunted him all night.

Next morning they were off again to Dunnottar, where George had only another day's work to finish his picture. Progress at first was slow. He had not slept well, and not till the light was fading and he could barely see to mix his colours was the last touch put. He had found his point of view on a broad ledge below the path on the cliff, concealed from passers-by and yet only twenty feet or so beneath the upper edge. Reid was lying on his back, painting the flame of the setting sun reflected on a crescent of cirrus clouds. Overhead the gulls were poising and swooping as if their mission were to reconnoitre these strange spies on their domain—then screeched and flew out of sight.

"Storm brewing!" said Reid, "the gulls are flying inland."

"No matter now," said George, "the picture is finished.

But you are right. Look at the whitecaps coming up on the sea, and that Penzance boat out there is pitching pretty lively. Look, they have turned and are making for harbour."

Reid rose up slowly and came over to look at George's canvas.

"Ay, sonny, ye'd better leave it now. Another touch might spoil it. We'll have a smoke and then pack up for home."

Sitting there in the calm enjoyment of well earned pipes, George and Reid smoked for a while in silence. Dusk came down upon them quickly, so after ten minutes or so they packed up and were about to leave when on the path above they heard voices.

"Bide a wee," said Reid, "wait till they have gone."

It was evidently a woman and a man, and they were quarrelling.

"Hist!" said George. "It's yon barmaid at the inn."

She was doing most of the talking. The man who was with her was English from his accent; and, when she called him Wolseley, George knew who it must be.

"I gave up my position for you," she was saying, "and look what I have come to now—serving drinks to dirty farmers and loafers, not to gentlemen. You promised to take care of me, but you gave me the slip after a fortnight and left me to pay the bills. The diamonds you gave me were fakes. You never meant to marry me in spite of your written word——"

"I'll pay you for the letters."

"You'll pay, sure enough, more than you think. I know now where your dirty money comes from. I know who gives you your allowance—your mother. I've got her address. She'll make you act square, she has promised me. I had a letter from her last week."

"Damn you!"

"Swear away! Words don't hurt me any more. It's deeds now. It has taken me over a year to do it, but I've got you now, right up against the wall."

"What does she say?"

"Oh, you think I'm such a fool as to carry the letter with me, so that you could steal it from me. Think I'm so green? No, but I know it by heart. It came all the way from India, from Simla. Ah, you see I *have* got the address. You thought she was at a safe distance, did you?"

"Well, what did she say?"

"She said that 'she was heartbroken by my pitiful story, and it seemed too cruel to be true, but that the letter I sent'—I sent her one that I could spare—'was in your handwriting, and if the other copied letters were correct, she was left without a shadow of defence for you.' Well, do you want any more?"

"Spit it out."

"Polite as usual. She went on to say that if she could possibly come to England, she would do so at once, but her husband was dangerously ill and she dared not leave him. What made my case so terribly sad was that you could not make the reparation which would save my good name—you were already married——"

"Well, if she knows that already, what's the use of trying to blackmail me?"

"Don't be in such a hurry. It's not blackmail that brought me here, it's to tell you how I mean to get even with you."

"Be quick then; I've got to catch the 9.15 to Aberdeen."

"The letter went on, that from what she could hear you had deserted your wife. But she had borne with your heartless conduct long enough, and you would have no more money from her to betray unfortunate women——"

"So that's her game!"

"She had therefore written to her lawyers to investigate my case, and if they found my statements correct, she had instructed them to cancel the allowance she had hitherto made you, and transfer to me such alimony——"

"Hell! is that what you asked me to come here for?"

"Yes, a week ago, but you only came to-day. I have risked losing my place to come here every afternoon, waiting for you."

"I didn't get your note till yesterday."

"Drunk and disorderly, I suppose."

"See the kind of husband you've escaped," he sneered. "Well, what do you want now you think you've got the money?"

"I want to know the whole truth—were you married when you took me away with you last year?"

"Yes."

There was a silence.

"Let's get out of this," whispered Reid.

Before George had time to reply, the man's voice came sharply:

"Let go my arm!"

"Is she still alive?" in a voice just as sharp.

"Yes, and a kid too, damn it!"

"Oh, you unmitigated cad! That settles it! You never had a heart, but I can hurt you through your pocket. I'll fix this up with those lawyers——"

"Then you haven't seen them yet?"

"It won't be long now."

"You never shall."

"Who will stop me?"

"I shall," fiercely.

"You cannot."

"I can—here. No one knows I came here."

There was a sound of struggling and stifled screams.

"Come on! Let's stop this!" cried George, and rushed up the little path leading from their ledge to the top of the cliff.

He was just in time, for, as he reached the top, the man had the woman gagged and was pushing her struggling figure to the edge.

"Stop! Stop!" cried George, and rushed to the rescue.

Startled at this sudden appearance, Wolseley Greville—for it was he—dropped the unfortunate woman and bolted

as fast as his limp would let him. George pursued him for a short distance, and then came back breathless to find that Reid had dragged her to a less dangerous spot and was loosening the handkerchief that gagged her. No sooner was her mouth free than she struggled to her feet and gazed wildly about her. But the excitement had evidently been too much for her, and before they could catch her she had fallen to the ground in a dead faint.

"Quick! some water!" cried Reid, loosening the buckle at her neck.

Before George could move, water was dashed on her face in the form of rain, the first downpour of a terrific storm which had crept upon them unawares. In a few minutes they were all drenched to the skin, and the woman recovered consciousness to find she was as wet as if she had really been thrown into the sea. The roar of the thunder and the rapid succession of forked lightning drove out of her mind for the moment her recent struggle. It was the natural instinct for all of them to seek shelter, and so with the rain lashing their backs they stumbled along the path towards Stonehaven.

"Shall we go in here?" shouted George as they approached a house.

"No use now," she called back. "I'm wet through. Better go back to the inn."

They were three very bedraggled objects when they reached the Market Square, but the rain still poured in torrents, so there was no one to see them. By the way she shook hands as they parted, George and Reid knew she was thanking them. But it was no time for ceremonies, so as soon as the door had closed behind her, they hurried off to their lodgings, where in dry clothes over a blazing fire they talked over the unexpected adventure.

"Now ye come to describe him, I know the fellow," said Reid. "Good riddance of bad rubbish! Let's hope he caught the 9.15 and a damned good chill as well. Yon poor lammie had a narrow squeak, but she's well able to take care o' hersel', never fear. But this is the end of our

sketching, sonny. We're in for a spell of bad weather—I saw it in yon clouds and I feel it in my old bones. Better pack up the morn's morn and make for the Sunny South. Meanwhile the old man will retire to the seclusion of three warm blankets, where with judicious doses of quinine and Lochnagar he will endeavour to sweat out the rheumatism that is within him, world without end, Amen."

So it was that for the second time they parted, George carrying with him a feeling that two years of experience had been crowded into these last few months.

More than ever the face of Wolseley Greville haunted his dreams. Some fate seemed to be bringing their two lives together. Perhaps he might never meet the man again, but deep down in his heart George had a strange unconquerable belief that yet again on some other day they would come into bitter conflict.

CHAPTER XII

RAVIN, ARTIST

IF life for George in London had sauntered on much longer without more intimate friendship, he would perhaps have grown to that shy attitude to Art which the book-worm hold to letters, touching only by such fine emotion as can reach the heart by the eye. Life, however, had another step in view and soon had him dancing in a more populous thoroughfare.

Ravin it was that did it, Ravin, that artist to whom Reid had given George an introduction when first he came to London. Had Ravin been a phlegmatic Englishman this story might have never been written; but don't you know how the heart opens to French suavity, French liveliness and unaffected gesture? Ravin came into this young Scot's life just as a beam of sunshine on a summer morning steals through your jealous shutters. You laugh and open the window to the blessed air.

George noticed the name first in a magazine, signed on a story illustration. It was a drawing delightful in light and shade. Ravin was evidently well worth knowing. George had kept a note of the address, and on calling again—it was a Sunday—he was scowled at by a dingy servant.

“Is Mr. Ravin——”

“Name, please?”

“Kindly take in that letter,” he said, as the girl sniffed at the envelope.

After a minute or so “Entrez!” came a musical voice from far away, and George felt his way through the passage. Out of a door on his left emerged a tall fair man whose moustache and imperial gave him a distinguished air

in spite of his shirt-sleeves. In the left hand was a palette, and in the right welcome.

"Excuse my lookingness," said the owner of the hand, with a pleasant foreign accent. "This is my day for painting."

George found himself in a gallery overlooking a large studio linked by a flight of stairs. One corner was filled with an etching press; in another stood a table wet with clay; a platform occupied the third; and in the fourth, indeed all over the floor, were costumes and magazines and papers chaotic. On the platform sat a model, evidently posing for the nude, but at the moment draped in a kimono.

"All right, Miss Lollipop—artist," as the model looked up.

"Not Miss Lollipop," said that lady crustily, "Miss Lola Poultenay."

"Miss Lola Poultry, Mr.—Mr.—*pardon, j'ai oublié*. Ah, Mr. Grange. Excuse me that my room so untidy, but my man so dirty I send him to the workhouse to clean up. *Par ici*; mind the tea kettle, and the bananas. Miss Lolipot sits on the cigarettes. *Merci*. You will draw, yourself, *n'est-ce pas?* She is a stunner, you bet! Ah, I will paint from her a knock-out of the deepest dye!"

Smiling at the Frenchman and feeling himself at once at ease, George sauntered round the room studying the pictures on the wall. Pastels they were for the most part, each with its thrill. Here were two sketches side by side, showing an avenue of chimney-pots, one of tender blues evidently done in earliest morning twilight, the other of the same subject in a glow of sunset's cadmiums and reds. Ravin must be an artist whose pleasure was in the accidents of light, not a mere subject thumper. These sketches called him back to the first lesson Reid had given him, when he made the great discovery that trees were not all green, but just the light that played on them. And yet here too were subjects: this, for instance, two little mites burning farthing dips and sending up masses

over the body of a dead canary; and this, a crowded street with flaring lamps, the life thrown up by contrast with that coffin, carried unnoticed through its midst. On the easel was a pastel just commenced.

"Ripping!" said George, half holding his breath.

"You like it? I am glad. But I am not practise. This black and white take it all out of me. You know I illustrate for books and magazines. Come now, Miss—work!"

The artist drew back a curtain which had been pulled in case of draught, showing a recess in which a bookcase and a bed were ranged beside an old-fashioned fire-place. This recess was lit up from the back of the house by a window, the panes of which were stained with cobalt. Its colour, mingled with the warm light of the fire, made the model's flesh as one might dream Queen Mab.

"I couldn't do that in monochrome," said George, who had unpocketed his pencil.

"Try pastel," said the Frenchman, pushing over a box.

It was the first time George had used this medium, but after half an hour had passed the Frenchman saw he was no fool.

"I like your colour," he nodded. "It is deefficult to use pastel. You paint? Ah, you pupil of Reid. He very sincere, and it is honour to be his friend. You must keep shadow luminous. See, you are too dark there; don't mix your colour so much; lose the edges more. So."

Ravin swept his flannel sleeves over George's sketch, and in the smudge slung in strong masses of colour.

The model grew impatient and demanded rest.

"All right. Oh blow! There's the bell. Ah, I forgot—the hairdresser."

"The who?" cried Miss Poultenay, starting up in alarm.

"Oh, all right, he is my friend. Put on some dresses."

"But, Mr. Ravin, you forget! I am no ordinary model."

"It's all right, I tell you," said Ravin. "I start another

sketch. But this hairdresser, he is my friend. Be quick, miss."

The model ran pouting behind the curtain, and Ravin chuckled as he stepped upstairs to let in the new visitor.

Coming himself of an old French family, the artist was too Bohemian to think of caste. He took all human nature as it came. A barber was an artist in hair, and this particular barber was a clever fellow-countryman. Every style of coiffure, from Phidias to the present day, was at his finger-ends.

Miss Poultenay reappeared in disarray of dress, much more suggestive than mere nudity. Out of the costumes which had carpeted the floor she had raked a Carmen skirt, reaching only to the knees. Above was a low-cut evening blouse. Her hair which had hitherto been tied up so as to leave the figure clear, now hung loose. She meant to impress the barber. And she succeeded.

Aristide Theophile Clemençon was propriety itself, and hardly dared to look her way. He talked of his wife, to show the model that his virtue was impregnable, while she in her turn became more amiable, plumping herself, during a rest, on a chair beside him.

Ravin relieved the situation.

"Just five minutes more before dinner!" he cried. "Come up, Miss Potsey, *posez-vous*."

Once more Miss Poultenay fell into her fascinating attitude, and once more she was disturbed. The dingy maid appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Peter come back from the work'us, sir," she panted.

Ravin burst into a roar of laughter.

"Pet-aire!" he shouted.

"My gracious!" cried the model. "Who's this now?"

"All right, Miss Popny," said the artist, "he not eat you. He my man who all dirty. I send him to the workhouse to clean up."

"Mr. Ravin," said the lady stiffly, "I am not used to workhouse company. If I had only known!"

"Oh, go on!" said Ravin, rushing impetuously upstairs.

In a moment he was back again, dragging by the ear a wizened, knock-kneed old man in corduroy suit, protesting with toothless jaws.

"Look at yourself, darling," he said, dragging his victim to a mirror.

"Gawd strike me dead!" mumbled the old man, struggling free. "Ain't I fit for the Queen's Palace? Got any-think to eat, gov'nor?" Then he caught sight of Carmen. "'Ullo, ladies present. Oh, only a model!"

This was too much for Miss Poultenay, who sprang down from her throne and angrily drew back the curtain. Ravin was in too high spirits to care, and went to the cupboard for wine to celebrate the return. Peter however expostulated.

"Oh 'ere, gov'nor, I didn't say 'drink.' I'm teetot'ler now, so 'elp me. 'Ere, wot's this?" kicking something wrapped in an old newspaper.

"That's rumpsteak," cried Ravin, pushing him aside. "Hurry up and light the stove."

The artist danced all round the studio, throwing knives and plates and forks on the platform, now to be his table.

Dinner so produced might seem unappetizing, but Ravin was a perfect cook. Miss Poultenay, who emerged in full dress buttoning her gloves for an offended exit, sniffed the air with a more tender nose. Then, as she saw that plates were laid for five, she melted.

"Ready!" shouted the host.

Dignity dropped all further pretence and buckled to. It was the most amusing meal that George had ever shared.

"Now Pet-aire," said Ravin, after the first sigh of satisfaction. "Tell how they treat you."

"Treat me, gov'nor? Look at me trousers!"

"Mr. Ravin!" exclaimed Miss Poultenay, who could now afford to reassert herself.

"Aw right, miss," said Peter, askance. "Don't stay fer me. As I was a-saying, I goes to the work'us having been kicked out of here, an' I sees at the gate a bloated cove in a blue suit, an' I says to him, 'Wot's the price of

free lodgin's 'ere?' 'Git out,' says 'e, 'this ain't no menagerie.' 'Git out yerself,' says I, 'I'm a free-born British subjick, an' I deman's me rights.' 'Wot's yer round?' says 'e. 'Round?' says I, 'I ain't got no round. I ain't a tramp. I'm a factotum.' 'Aw right,' says 'e, an' puts me down in 'is books as a teetot'ler. Well, that kin' o' guv me a persition, an' I takes a front pew at Bible readin's an' edoocashional lectures."

Peter paused for breath.

"Got a fag, gov'nor?"

After a few puffs at his cigarette, the old man went on:

"Yes, they enlightens the min's o' free-born British subjicks with edoocashional lectures. Ol' chap came larst Monday to lecture on turbine ingins, haw, haw!"

"Go on!"

"Gawd's truth," said the old man. "Free-born British subjicks! Well, 'e gits on the platform an' says that turbine ingins is 'orizontal.' "'Orizental be blowed!' says I, gittin' up, an' wi' that I gives 'em a lecture on turbine ingins wot made the ol' chap look silly. As if I didn't know better, me bein' an inventor. The work'us chaps was so pleased that they promotes me."

"Promoted you!"

"Yes, window cleaner to the establishment. But they ain't guv me no wages, an' I ain't goin' back to work for noffink. Good-bye, miss, adoo!"

Miss Poultenay was sailing out.

"When shall I come again?" she whispered.

"I'll write," said Ravin, giving her some silver.

"Only eight shillings!" she said loudly, looking at the money with a hard, unlovely expression. "I always get double for Sundays."

Ravin flushed and handed her some more.

"What a swindle!" said George, when she had gone. "These models are only too glad to get Sunday sittings."

"Never mind," said Ravin. "She starve. You notice how she eat? She is a hactress out of engagement. She get the sack for not kissing the manager."

Such was his generous excuse for her sharp practice. Poor Ravin, as George found out, was at the mercy of his soft heart. As evening came round, the studio was filled with the oddest characters, clearly come on the chance of a meal. Night fell, and still they stayed, till at last when one took off his jacket and pillowed it on the floor, George realised that the good-natured Frenchman gave a roof to unfortunate fellows out of a job: actors, musicians, waiters, shop assistants, the motliest and most pathetic crowd in London.

George spent many pleasant Sundays with his new friend, painting and making odd acquaintances. The Frenchman was so ingenuous, and at the same time had such insight into human nature that his conversation was always delightful. His generosity made him somewhat hard of access, for so open-handed was he when he did own money that debts remained unpaid—and any visitor might prove a dun. Finding that Ravin was visitor at an evening class for black and white, George joined this, not so much because he fancied costume as to keep in touch with one whom he sincerely liked. They often went round to Frascati's after the class, or knocked about in Soho, studying the curious life of London's foreign quarter.

Nowhere did Ravin's admirable character shine so bright as in that hermitage of squalor separating Oxford Street from Leicester Square, in which all the exiles of the world foregather and feel homesick. Exiles they are, though they may nominally have come as foreign citizens to the great metropolis. They are in London, not of it—French for the most part in language, and wholly French in heart. Take, for instance, that jewel-cutter over there, watering, as he has watered for these sixty years, his shilling claret at his shilling dinner. Sixty years he has been in England, but his English still is limited to "Good morning." He is but one of a thousand who for some forgotten reason have left the land they never can forget.

Most curious of all the Soho restaurants that Ravin haunted was one whose custom was frequented by the outcasts of Society—thieves, bullies, forgers, blackmailers—hardly one who did not lie within the shadow of the law. Ravin might be aristocratic by birth, and yet he was good fellow to such as these. If they were outcast, he too was Bohemian, keeping by instinct to the laws, but reckless of the customs, of Society. They knew he was an artist and admitted him to their acquaintance. As a comrade, he might bring his friends. This confidence was not abused; and, if he did bring any one, it was some unsophisticated person such as George.

To George, with his slim knowledge of provincial life, such traffic of the underworld was a revelation. Half a dozen visits here told him more of the human character than as many years among conventions. A convict's features were rather seared by punishment than vice, so fine is the hair dividing character from crime. And yet there was a nameless Type that held them all together. It would have been an outrage openly to sketch them, but as he drew their shapes from memory George found this Something wonderfully fugitive. Still, it was there and in their presence unmistakable.

These outcasts held their curious etiquette. The first commandment was that none must speak too loud. Walls have ears, and ears are spies. Angry voices might be echoed by a policeman's whistle. Detectives knew the haunt, but they found it saved them so much trouble when a sinner was required that they never interfered, even though coin changed hands over many a game of cards.

Ravin knew this etiquette, and followed it with a frankness that sometimes startled the less initiated George. They were gossiping one evening with a genial Frenchman who had manslaughter and New Caledonia behind his back, when a well-built fellow entered the restaurant. Ravin at the moment made no remark. After a while he whispered to George:

"That's Buriot, the famous wrestler."

The new-comer had joined another group, but presently he saluted Ravin.

"Monsieur Ravin, I think. You are the artist, is it not, who drew a picture of me at the International Tournament, for an illustrated paper?"

"You are right, Monsieur Buriot!"

"An excellent likeness. I am interested in art and, as a matter of fact, deal in pictures also. May I have the pleasure of your further acquaintance? I should like to visit you in your studio."

"Impossible," replied Ravin, bowing politely.

"Impossible? But you are an artist, are you not?"

"Yes," replied the artist quite calmly, "but you are a thief."

George held his breath. To his surprise the wrestler merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said, "I will bring you some engravings here to-morrow."

It was agreed, and Buriot returned to his group.

"Bravo," said the convict when he had gone. "Don't let any of us *maquereaux* come to your studio. You are a sensible man, Monsieur Ravin."

"You treated him rather roughly," said George when they left the restaurant.

Ravin laughed.

"You not know," he said. "You English are what you call sentimentalist. I had one of these thieves round at my studio once—he was an acrobat and said he was hard up, so I give him a sitting. At the end I give him ten bob, but he say, 'Excuse me, that not enough. I want a quid.' I not know what to do, for he was a big man who meant business. So I say to him, 'All right, I go fetch my purse upstairs.' So I go upstairs and I fetch my revolver and I come down and I say, 'You damn son of a gun, you go out quick or you go to hell.' Well, he went pretty quick, but I ask no more *maquereaux* to my studio. In the café it is different, *hein?*"

Such company might have done George harm had he not had the instinct of the true artist. If he had confined his study only to professional models, he might have wasted years before he understood expression. The vacuous stare at 7s. 6d. a day has only surface value and little enough at that. But in this outcast herd the sculptor Passion had moulded features massively, and George began to show in his work vitality which school could never teach him.

Remote as was this underworld from his other life, George yet found a thread connecting. He was sipping coffee one day with Ravin, when the door swung open and in came a heavy-coated man, yet not so heavy-coated as to hide his limp. The face was unforgettable. It was Wolseley Greville.

What was there so sinister about the face? Even in that confraternity of bullies he seemed to be disliked—thumbs were pointed and whispers were heard.

“Let’s get out of this,” said George.

When they were out into the open he breathed as one who had escaped from danger.

“What do you know of that man? The clean-shaven one with the coat and the limp—came in just before we went out?”

“Ah, you ask me another, I not know him, and I not want to know him. These bullies, they know his business and they are afraid. You never can tell, but don’t he look a devil?”

“Perhaps mixed up with the police.”

“No, I don’t think, else he would be dead by now—those chaps too quick with their knives. No, I think he’s in the same game, but his face is new to me. You wait a bit—I find out.”

One day George noticed at the black and white class in front of him a girl with auburn hair. She was so busy with her drawing that he could not even see her profile. Then some one knocked an easel over. The girl turned

for a moment—a moment of disappointment. Quite a common face in that aureole of hair.

“Come to me to-morrow afternoon,” said Ravin when he came round. “I do some modelling lately and I want to show you a figure. I think you like it.”

George was glad of the invitation, for Ravin had of recent Sundays been so inaccessible that friendship seemed impracticable. This time the servant must have had orders to let him in, for she flung the door open.

Near the platform was a statuette, nude figure of a young girl, standing with feet together and leaning back with draped and outstretched arms, a butterfly as it were, delicately tinted here and there, with hair of reddish gold.

“Fine! Fine!” he exclaimed.

“Ah, good!” said Ravin, for he loved praise. “But it not quite original. The red I got partly from the baking and I touch up the hair. I see something like it in Paris, note quite the same.”

“With red hair?”

“No, but she has—I mean the girl. She will be here in a minute and then see for yourself. Ripping figure! Perhaps you see her at the school yesterday. She would like to be artist, but I don’t know.”

“The spirit is willing——”

“I think so. But it is deefficult to tell her. You see, I like her. She good girl. Here she comes! Her name is Miss Marriott.”

It was the girl with the auburn hair.

She bowed to George without speaking, and after a few minutes came from behind the curtain. Certainly a lovely figure. As he got out his sketch book, George wondered how he could have thought her face common. Sensible too, for she talked of pictures well. After half an hour came the rest, and Miss Marriott slipped a wrap over her figure.

“May I see your sketches?” she said, coming over to George.

George gave his book shyly.

"Why," she exclaimed, "how like your work is to one of Mr. Ravin's pupils!"

"I am one of his pupils," replied George.

"Perhaps that is it," she said. "There are some others here. Just look at them and see if you don't think so too."

Stepping to a drawer, she brought out a portfolio of sketches.

"Am I as bad as that?" said George, as he turned over the loose sheets. "After all, there is nothing like hearing the truth."

"That's what I think," replied Miss Marriott, smiling at Ravin. "Tell me what is wrong with them. I rather like them. But I am only a model."

"These, I should say, are the work of one who has started to draw too late in life. The manner shows a cramped hand. They are done by some one who has artistic feeling, but without construction, and heavy. A woman, I should say, and no good—never will be. To think I can only draw like that!"

He shut the portfolio abruptly, throwing his cigarette into the fire.

"It's all right," said Miss Marriott, laughing. "It was just a joke. You don't draw in the least like that. I only wanted to hear the truth about them. They are my own sketches. You know I try to be an artist too. And now, Mr. Ravin," turning to the artist, "I think I had better go on posing."

Ravin shrugged his shoulders at George.

"You done it now!"

They sketched in silence.

After a little, George said:

"You pose well. I hope you are as model in other ways."

"A good woman can never be a good model," was the reply. "She shows her age too soon."

"Then you don't like to think that you'll grow old?"

"At the first crow's-foot I shall drown myself."

"Why not marry instead?"

"Another road to the same place."

"Well, your mother married," protested George.

"No, she didn't," said Miss Marriott abruptly.

George dropped his pencil in surprise.

"You believe in facing facts," he said.

"My mother died of facts. It was a bitter winter. They found us on the Embankment."

Another silence.

"Let's go to the Queen's Hall," said Ravin. "I'm sick of work. Miss Marriott come with us, *hein?*"

They went to the concert and then saw the girl to her home. Before George separated from Ravin he apologised for having put his foot in it.

"All right, old man," said the Frenchman. "You not know women yet. They are full of damn tricks. But she's a nice girl, and she got a ripping figure!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE MODEL AT THE LANGHAM

MISS MARRIOTT'S laugh rang in George's ears all next day. Not that the laugh was very musical—an untrained contralto, yet so rich that its roughness attracted.

"I wish I had her pluck," he mused.

In the evening he sauntered to the Langham, an artists' club to which he had recently been elected. A model sat there every evening except Friday, and though the pose was often set to suit the needs of some pot-boiler, one could use it as a study. The studio itself was well arranged, with a separate light for each stool, and for those who wished costumes there was a good historical collection.

The glare from a restaurant reminded him that he was hungry. His watch showed half an hour to spare, so he went in.

"Coffee, please, roll and butter."

While the waiter fetched his order, George mechanically turned over the leaves of his sketch-book. They were for the most part pencil studies, done in an hour or two at the Langham or at Ravin's, chiefly nudes. Hitherto he had scanned these with uncritical eye. The glamour of self flatters our own work. Miss Marriott, however, had helped him to the truth. His drawing was unsympathetic, correct in proportion and true enough in the values, but—still Ravin had told him to stick to it. So too had Reid. Perhaps the sentiment would come. Perhaps! He had been nearly two years now at art, and it was long in coming.

The clatter of the waiter made him look up at a girl almost a woman, on the seat opposite.

"Worth a sketch," he thought as he stirred his coffee.

But first the inner man. He could study the girl quietly as he ate, and do her from memory. He must practise this memory drawing.

Looking at her over the rim of his cup, he saw her smiling, and blushed. She on her part seemed more than ever amused. After a minute she said:

"Excuse my speaking to you. You are an artist, aren't you? You have a mirror behind you, and I couldn't help seeing your sketches. Oh, it's all right, you didn't shock me—I am an artist's model myself. May I look at your sketch-book?"

She put out her hand, and he could hardly refuse.

As she turned it over he noticed that her hands were well-shaped and dainty.

"That," she said, stopping at one page. "Surely that's the Langham."

"Yes," said George, leaning over to see. "There was a rotten model one night, so I sketched the room itself. Rather a fine effect of light and shade—quite Rembrandt-*esque*."

She leaned a little, too, and her hair touched his. Hers was crisp and golden, perhaps a shade too golden. He drew back uneasily.

"What a coincidence!" she said. "I'm posing there to-night—for this week. You must come and draw me. But perhaps you will think me rotten too."

Vain fishing!

"What do you like best," she went on, "painting or drawing?"

"At night I prefer to draw."

"I sit for lots of artists, though I have not been doing this long. Let me write my name and address in your book—Ethel Swallow, 510 King's Road, Chelsea. Pretty busy just now, but I'm free on Sundays as a rule. Oh, it's time to go."

She prepared for flight.

She was distinctly rapid.

However, there was no harm in walking with her.

"Two bills together, sir?" said the waiter.

Miss Swallow buttoned her gloves very hard.

There was no help for it. George said "Yes," and silently cursed the curse of an Aberdonian from the bottom of his purse.

As they walked along Oxford Street people turned to look at his companion.

"N.H.B.—not 'arf bad," said an approving news-boy.

"I wonder that you walk," remarked George, inclined to be malicious. "I should have thought you preferred your brougham."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I thought all models were actresses once, and all actresses have broughams."

"I left mine in Paris." She tossed her head.

"So you know Paris."

"My father was French."

French? Quite possible. That unusual taste in dress—unusual at any rate for one of her profession. The average model slips round from studio to studio in the average sack.

French? Perhaps, though there was little trace of accent in her English.

She must be over twenty—there was the least touch of artificial bloom on that pretty cheek.

He was relieved when they arrived.

This being Monday, every one except the artist who arranged the pose was locked out of the studio in the anteroom till the model should be in position, and as it happened there was some delay. An impatient mob waited at the door.

"What's the model to be this week?" growled some one. "Another girl, I suppose. Why can't they have a cavalrman, or something sensible?"

"You bet it's a girl, and a nude," said another. "It's Ben Jones's week, and his dealer won't have anything else. She'll be lying down, so that when he gets home

he can slick in a lake shore and some trees and a couple of swans."

"Any one ever seen a picture by Ben without swans? I'd like to wring their damned necks."

Just then the key turned in the door. They trooped in and jostled for seats.

Yes, she was nude and lying down. Where Ben Jones had picked his seat one could imagine a lake-shore and trees and the swans; or one could imagine the shore of the sea.

Her figure was rather more full than George expected, but it was all in perfect proportion.

Her pose was really beautiful. She was lying full length on her side, with right hip swung forward and her head in hair massed like sand-drift. The colour, even under the incandescent glare, was delicate and tender, the shadows transparent, while pale greens and blues from a tapestry behind interlaced rose-madder.

At the end of the first hour George was in full swing, eager to express the spirit of the figure. Some moved into the next room to smoke and chat, but George stayed on at his stool, feeling out the form as he remembered it. As he leaned over his sketch-book, a wave of warmth disturbed him. She was looking over his shoulder.

"Charming!" she said, and sat down on the stool beside him.

The wrap she wore was half open. A man behind leaned over the desk and winked.

"Very!" he said in her ear.

As she turned George slipped away, glad of this diversion.

Then the second hour came and his annoyance was forgotten.

The pose was so good that the evening was over ere he was aware.

"Ripping model!" was the general verdict.

George looked over the magazines before he put on his coat. He thought he was the last to leave, when Miss Swallow suddenly flung out of the dressing-room.

"You live in Chelsea, too?" she said.

"No—that is, yes."

He walked unwillingly with her to Oxford Circus.

"Shall we take a cab?" she said.

"I keep my shillings for my work," was his excuse.

Miss Swallow pouted.

"Oh, come on! You can knock it off my money when you give me a sitting."

But George had had experience in the restaurant, and they took a bus. On the way she talked of the artists to whom she sat, criticising with as much wit as impertinence.

"Penny for your thoughts," she said suddenly.

"I—oh, I—I was thinking."

"What?"

"What a model thinks of."

"What is that?"

"Why," said George maliciously again, "she thinks and thinks, and counts the seconds and the minutes and the hours till they mount up to 7s. 6d."

"You *are* nasty."

"And yet you asked for my escort."

"Did I?"

They reached her door.

"Good night, Miss Swallow," he said, as she turned the key.

"Good night. Remember you've promised me a sitting."

"Yes, I'll write to you."

He was glad of the first corner.

Yet as he turned it something stopped him, made him look back.

She had disappeared, but at the same door there was another figure—a figure that he knew. At any rate he had seen that coat before, surely—where? Of course, in Soho—that heavy-coated figure with the limp.

The door opened, the man stepped in—the limp was unmistakable. Wolseley Greville again!

Was there any connexion between these two?

Would he ever come across her again? Not at the Langham—he had other things to do every night that week. He had promised her a sitting, at least she said he had. What infernal cheek she had! Of course she had to be pushing to get work—there were so many models. Funny she had no accent, though her father was French. Must ask Ravin's advice. Ah, the very man!

CHAPTER XIV

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE

GEORGE was now just of the age and in the mood to feel the glamour of sex. Incessant work may for a while distract the mind from petticoats, but only for a while. The mind has a frame built of flesh and blood that cannot be sustained or satisfied with work alone. It has its hours for food and its seasons for the thrill of mating. One and twenty may induce itself to be ascetic, and might be more ascetic still in a world of ugly faces, but in this city of the fair how can it possibly escape?

The unrest that took hold of him was far too deep for him to fathom. He wondered if he was unwell because sometimes he could not work. He forgot that work was not the summit of existence. Not knowing what to do, he wandered out into the streets, by preference where there were lights and the companionship of many faces, Frascati's was a favourite refuge, with its music and its babel.

Then when the music ended he would perambulate the pavements, studying the current of humanity that swept along—lovers here, monotonously married there, penurious and pampered, country folk and city-bred. It was the lovers that he most liked to look at, wondering if ever he might have a girl upon his arm, and, if so, would she be fair or dark? What would they talk about? Would she understand him? Would he be the first to be her lover? Would they exchange confessions? Would she ever throw him over? Could he do without her if she did?

Some day, perhaps, she would sit with him by their own fireside, and they would talk for hours and hours and hours of art, and loveliness, and death—the great things. Their souls would—

Bump! he went into a lamp-post and so back to life.

Only for a while.

He would treat her very tenderly, not asking too curious questions about her past life, shielding her from the world. They would have a cosy room to sit and talk in, a big studio with an ingle-nook.

He would work with a new spirit and she would be his model. He would paint such pictures as would make him famous. How proud she would be of him and how proud he would be of his beautiful—

Bump again! Damn those lamp-posts!

On such a saunter he found himself one night that week in Wardour Street, half-dreaming, till he woke to find himself face to face with some one who was speaking to him. It was a woman, and a woman of the street.

In such a situation he would usually have stepped aside and so escaped her, but there was something in the face of this one that arrested.

The woman turned her profile to him—her deadliest snare. Surely there was something in that face he once had seen before—where was it? Who could she be? Wasn't it—ah, yes!

He memorised every line of her, trembling a little, but gradually recovering control. She on her part was sure of him—he was not her first captive.

"Well," she said, turning her face again.

It was the Lady Might-Have-Been, not quite so fair, but still so very fair; not quite so fine, older—good God, how old!

"Well," she said, "you ought to know me now."

"Yes," said George, "now I know you, but how you have changed!"

It was her turn to tremble. The misery of such as these is to have no memory for faces. All her colour fled from her.

"What do you mean? I never saw you before," she stuttered, stepping back.

"I never thought to find you here," said George. "Your name is Molly Arnold. You come from Aberdeen——"

Before he could restrain her she was gone.

Poor girl! This was her descent!

The Lady Might-Have-Been!

And that low blackguard, Wolseley Greville, who had ruined her as he had ruined that barmaid and many another—he had lost his income but was there to be no real reckoning for him?

Like enough not till he got to hell.

Molly's hell had come sooner.

George wondered what he would have done suppose she had not run away. Suppose she had remembered him and made this the excuse for further acquaintance. If she had been a thorough bad lot that might have been awkward.

He was well out of it.

She might have been a coward, but so, too, was he himself. He must nerve himself to study men and women right down to their hearts if he was to be a true artist. Why shouldn't he speak to such as she—make friends of such as she, or at least acquaintance? Life was made up of such people.

He had no relations to worry about his reputation—he could go where he liked, with whom he liked.

All the same, it might end in trouble. These women had bullies.

Here again was the shadow of Wolseley Greville? *There* was a devil if ever there was a devil.

Better not touch pitch!

Such thoughts whirling through his brain, George made his way back to his rooms, and as he sat over his fire he drew the face of this poor unfortunate.

As he drew, a phrase or two that rhymed came to his lips, and with his pencil he put them down and strung them into a few verses. This is how they ran:

"Aye, with what grace she grew among the green,
Delirious grasses that she ran between.
(O lovesick Rush, whom fairer hast thou seen?)

But out alack! she loitered to the town
And laid a-low her little country crown
(Yet was more queenly as she rustled down).

And out alack! she lingered at the fair
And won the brightness that no maid should wear
(And knew the darkness that no maid should dare).

Yet with what grace she grew among the green,
Delirious grasses that she ran between.
(O lovesick Rush, whom fairer hast thou seen?)

CHAPTER XV

ETHEL SWALLOW

GRANGE! Grange!"

George was walking along the Strand when he heard a familiar voice calling him from the top of a bus. It was Ravin who tumbled down the steps to join him. The Frenchman was dressed in frock coat and silk hat, a world too large.

"I found a neegger," he said, laughing. "Oh, that confounded heel!"

He slipped off an elastic-side boot, shook out a stone, and put it on again.

Ravin was certainly unique.

"Yes," he continued, wiping his hands on his pocket-handkerchief, "I found a neegger in the Strand."

"You don't mean me?" said George.

"No, a black charcoal neegger from the Sudan. I think him cannibal, and he pray to my statue with red hair. Oh, he is lovely. Come and have some grub, and I tell you about him."

As they sat in a Soho restaurant, Ravin told his story. Walking along the Strand the day before, he had met a six foot negro, gaily robed, followed by a curious crowd. He was just the type the artist wanted for an illustration, so Ravin stopped him. The man had come from the Sudan, thinking that London, the place where the rich English came from, must be paved with gold. Lo, the poor negro, sadly undeceived! Ravin came to his rescue and let him sleep in his studio till he found a job.

"And Petaire—he mad. He swear so 'orrible I plaster his mouth with clay. 'Gawd's truth!' he say, 'me a free-

born British subjick, come back from the work'us to sich degradation! Me sleep in the same room as that 'ere halien himmigrant wot prays to foreign hidols! 'E's wus than a blackbeetle. Good-bye, gov'nor, adoo! And so Petaire leave me. But he come back soon. He get hungry."

"Can the nigger speak French?"

"Only a leetle. Not like I speak English. But I soon understand. I speak English pretty well, don't I?" he added, as George involuntarily smiled.

"First-rate," said George. "Just a little accent sometimes, but one hardly notices."

"Ah, yes, but I know I sometimes make *faux pas*. Last night I dine with my friend Mrs. Grosvenor, awful tip-top swell, and we talk about the portraits by Lely at Hampton Court. 'They are regular knock-out, these beauties,' I say. 'I could ravish them every one.' She laugh. Now is it not English to ravish—*ravisser*?"

"Yes," said George, laughing also, "but not quite in the way you mean. Never mind, your friend will give you many invitations on the chance of your making such mistakes. But talking of French and English, I have an experience to tell you of. I want your advice."

George told him of the model at the Langham, told the whole story of the evening, all except the recognition of Wolseley Greville. It might have been coincidence that these two lived in the same house—they might not even know each other.

"Look here, Grange," said Ravin. "You be careful with some of these little devils. If she good model give her a sitting. But there are plenty good model. Have you a sketch of her?"

George had his book with him.

"Ah, she good figure. By gad, your drawing improve! That's the best one you done. Shall we write to her for next Sunday? It's all right at my studio. If she try any game, I chuck her out, you bet. Perhaps we have some fun. I write to her that you give me her name."

On Sunday George was punctual, not unwilling to meet the girl again. She had been forward, but she was uncommonly pretty—that golden hair and that figure. He had an instinct that he was on the edge of adventure.

Ravin's studio was untidier than ever, and as she had not yet arrived they put in the time trying to disentangle things.

"Where is your nigger?" said George.

"Oh, he got a job in Soho, but he still sleep here at night. Don't you smell him? Petaire stay way, but he come back to-night, you bet. He hungry, surely."

A tinkle, and Ethel Swallow arrived, without apologies.

She looked suspiciously at the disarray. George had half hoped to find her as he had left her, but instead she snubbed him.

"You here?" She nodded stiffly. "Ah, to be sure, Mr. Ravin said in his note you had given him my name."

"My friend is French," said George. "By the way, you can speak to him in his own language."

"How delightful!" she exclaimed, turning to Ravin. "Je vous demande pardon pour mes fautes d'expression. J'ai oublié tant——"

And so on.

She certainly spoke fluently. Perhaps her French father—

Another arrow.

"My friend," said George, "is the son of the great explorer, André Ravin, you know, who led the famous North Pole expedition."

"André Ravin!" she cried, clasping her hands. "The son of the great explorer! How interesting!"

"Oh, it is nothing," said Ravin, somewhat embarrassed, and busied himself with his palette. "The dressing-room is there," he added, pointing to the recess.

"What do you want—costume or figure?"

"Figure, please, miss."

"Who the deuce is this explorer?" he whispered, when she had withdrawn.

"Jiggered if I know," returned George. "I invented him. Keep it up."

"Ah, yes," said Ravin as she reappeared in a wrap. "My father, he married a Esquimau. I am the only painter in London whose mother a Esquimau. That is why I have peculiar style."

"Indeed! And how is that?"

"My friend is a portrait painter," said George solemnly. "He is quite the rage just now. All Society people want him to do their portraits."

"Oh, not all. Only few!" said Ravin deprecatingly.

Her eyes swept round the studio. It was certainly unlike that of a fashionable portrait painter.

"Not here, of course," George hastened to explain. "This is only where he works on Sunday. He has a large studio in Bond Street."

Miss Swallow brightened.

"I wonder," she said, "have you ever met my old friend, Lady Mackintosh Macduff?"

"Lady Macduffintosh?" said Ravin, scratching his head. "Of course! I paint her portrait, *hein?*" Turning to George, "It is somewhere here."

"Yes, you put it there against the wall. You told me you would not send it because she never paid you."

"Never paid you!" she cried. "Surely, surely not. I used to know her quite well, and she had lots of money."

"I assure you," said Ravin. "I show you her portrait. You see!"

He brought out a canvas, of Miss Marriott as it happened, in a white silk dress.

Miss Swallow was too clever for them.

"Not very like her," she said. "It's nice in colour, but—I don't wish to be rude—perhaps it is the Esquimau style."

Ravin looked foolish.

"I will tell her what you say. She like it herself. She will be interested to know you pose for picture. You good friends with her?"

"We were, but I am afraid she has forgotten me—ever since the crash."

"Oh, you have a crash?"

"Yes, we were in the same set. Lady Macduff helped my mother to choose the satin for my presentation gown. I was to have been presented at Court, when suddenly poor father died, leaving us nothing but debts. It seems ages ago, and yet it is only a year. Of course we were dropped by everybody."

"Your mother alive?"

"Yes—that is, no—" she hesitated a little. "It is a sad story."

An awkward pause.

Ravin took up his palette.

"Now, miss, we want to work—on this platform here. By gad! isn't she ripping! Here, I give you something to sit on—arms around the ankles—so."

She was certainly very beautiful.

While Ravin was directing the pose, George had opportunity to study her more closely.

"You don't wear any rings," he remarked after a while, as Ravin rearranged her hands.

His easel was at the side, and she could not turn without disturbing the pose, but she looked at him through the corners of her eyes.

"Don't you think my hands quite nice enough without my needing rings?" she answered. "Besides, I am not engaged."

"Quite right!" said Ravin. "Don't be in a hurry. You got lots of time yet, and men are horrid."

"Some men certainly are," she said, still eyeing George.

For an hour or so they worked on without speaking. Then Ravin said:

"Tell me your mother's sad story."

"My mother?" She seemed taken a little aback, then remembered. "Ah, yes! Poor mother! When my father died, and we discovered our real circumstances, the shock was so great that she had to go into a nursing home, a

private asylum. And I had to do something to earn my living. As it happened, the daughter of the landlady where I had lodgings was an artists' model, so I accepted sittings also. I was so alone and so friendless. But now I have lots of engagements. Everybody wants me to sit to them."

"I am not surprise," said Ravin. "You beautiful colour, and your figure is regular knock-out. You so different from most girls of your age—more mature——"

"How old do you think I am?"

"In years, or in experience?" said George.

"How cynical he is!" She spoke to Ravin. "Has he met with a disappointment?"

Ravin protested.

"Don't mind him, miss. He don't know how to talk to pretty girl like you. He just fresh to London from some half-civilised country way up near the North Pole."

"Ah," she said quickly, "another Esquimau."

The two conspirators looked at each other and laughed.

"You altogether too smart," said Ravin. "Come on—we have some lunch now, and you tell us how old you are when you have tasted my omelet."

Slipping a wrap over her shoulders, she stepped down from the platform, and as the Frenchman fetched out plates and things for the midday meal, she wandered round examining the canvases upon the walls, or piled upon the floor. In spite of their earlier attempt to tidy up, the studio was still in a deplorable chaos.

"Well, Mr. Ravin!" she suddenly exclaimed, as she picked up a piece of paper from a heap in a particularly dusty corner. "You really are the limit!"

Ravin stepped over with a plate in each hand to see what she had found. It was a cheque for fifty pounds.

"Oh, blow!" he said quite casually, "just put it into my waistcoat pocket. That is nothing. You see, we are not such big liars as you think."

That fifty pounds clearly added mightily to her respect, and perhaps as well, for the Esquimau story was really

rather thin. George, too, came in for some of this new sunshine. She was too much of a woman not to see that he was handsome, and perhaps he, too, was rich. His study of her figure was so sympathetic that she felt she had made an impression, however much he might pretend to sneer. Still Ravin, as the man who could leave cheques lying loose in dusty corners, was the best game of all, so Ravin got the most attention. He was born to flatter, and she was clay to the potter.

As the day drew on, the little story-teller had woven a romance around herself. Ravin led her on, perfect artist in sympathy. When the time came for her to leave she might well imagine she had captured him.

"I suppose you don't want my escort again," said George, as she swept out.

"No, thanks. But you may whistle for a hansom."

When she had gone the two men laughed till their sides were sore.

"She is glory hallelujah!" roared Ravin.

"Shall we have her again?"

"You bet! She got the stunningest colour I ever see. Oh, by gad! I do a picture from her which they will buy for the Luxembourg. And you, too! Your progress is *merveilleux*. You catch her hair simply tip-top. And the shadow—so luminous, so transparent!"

"Well, I must be going now," said George, to cover his embarrassment.

"Oh, blow! You need not go. I have some grub. Beside, I want to show you my neegger. He come back soon."

They talked and talked till it grew late. One or two of the familiar out-o'-works came in, and took their places by the wall. Peter, too, returned, very tired and very hungry, able only to drop in his corner and munch his piece of bread. When it was nearly eleven the bell rang.

"It's that neegger," said Ravin angrily, as he went up the stairs to open the door. "Why he not come in by the back? I give him what for."

George thought he might as well go now, but he was curious to see this negro, whose romantic story entitled him to some little sympathy.

Ravin fumbled at the door, unable to find the latch. Then he got it, lifted it, opened the door and started back.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, holding up the candle. "Miss Swallow!"

"Hush! May I come in—just a minute? You are alone, aren't you?"

Whether she might or not, she came, Ravin at her heels.

On hearing her voice, George slipped back into the corner where he had been sitting. The only light in the big studio came from and was half concealed in the recess, the candle flickering out in the draught.

"Oh, blow! I have no match."

"Never mind," she said. "It is so nice and mysterious here. How I should love to live in a place like this."

"But tell me how you come so late?"

"Oh, Mr. Ravin, it's all so sudden that I can hardly think. I went to the concert at the Queen's Hall and then to supper, and when I got back I found myself locked out. I had not paid my rent last week, but I thought my landlady was a friend and would wait. I walked up and down thinking what to do, but it was no use. I had spent all my money on the ticket and the cabs and the supper, and so I could not go to an hotel. How could I find new lodgings without any luggage and so late at night—a Sunday, too. I was in despair, when suddenly I thought of you. You were so kind, and I thought you might have a spare room just for one night. I knew I could trust to your honour."

Ravin coughed. George shrank still further out of sight.

"I have no spare room," said Ravin. "If you like you can sleep in that recess till to-morrow. The floor will do for me."

"Oh, how good of you! I shall find new rooms to-morrow. I know I shall be safe with you."

"Your beauty such, I worship from afar."

"And there will be a curtain between us, won't there?"

"Of course. Take care you not trip."

She was coming cautiously down the dark stair. As she reached the floor and made for the recess, she noticed something moving near the wall of the studio.

"What, what is that?"

"That? Oh, that is only my man, Petaire."

She shrieked as she swerved from the uncanny heap. This brought her to another of the sleepers.

"And that?"

"Oh, that is only the soleecitor."

"And that one there?"

"I think that is the sweep."

A heavy step was heard on the stair. It was the nigger who had come in through the door which the embarrassed Ravin had forgot to shut. In the uncertain light the dark face of the negro loomed satanic. No wonder that Miss Swallow went into hysterics.

She came to rapidly and cried to be let out.

"To be sure," said Ravin politely. Then, at the top of the stair, he shouted, "Grange! You there still?"

"Yes," replied George, emerging from his corner.

"Well," said Ravin, "this lady want some one to take her home."

CHAPTER XVI

EXPLANATIONS

ETHEL was already in the street before George had reached the door.

"Don't go," said Ravin, holding him back, "I only joking."

"It's no joke," said George firmly. "I mean to have it out with her."

Ravin shrugged his shoulders.

"Be careful," was all he said.

She had not turned the corner of the street and George soon caught her up. She stiffened as she saw him, chin in the air.

"Look here, Miss Swallow," said George thickly. "This is not good enough. I give you a recommendation to a friend and this is the game you play. You have mistaken your vocation. You are not meant for Chelsea."

"Go on."

"If this story is known," he continued, "you will be shown the door by every decent artist. And these stories do get known. I hope to goodness you are only a little fool. But your behaviour is precious fishy."

"Anything else?"

"Yes," he said, goaded to rudeness. "You call yourself Miss Swallow—why not Mrs.?"

Under the lamplight he saw her turn pale. She stood still and burst into tears.

George was prepared for any kind of defence but this. He couldn't think what to do.

How far Ethel was really crying only the Recording Angel knows. The human scribe claims no omniscience

where a woman is concerned. Suffice it to say that she might have been heart-broken.

"Here—here—" he said, "don't do that. Here, tell me what's the matter. I was rather rough on you. Come, now, be a good girl, pull yourself together."

That made no difference.

He caught her by the arm, but she cried out:

"Don't! it hurts!"

"Look here," he said in desperation. "You mustn't, mustn't go on like this. Let's talk it over quietly. There's a pub just round the corner, quite quiet, where we can have a chat. You look ill—you need some brandy. Come now, be sensible."

"Very well," she said, still sobbing, but drying her eyes and moving on with him.

It was still a quarter of an hour to closing time, and as luck would have it they found a quiet corner in the room of the saloon bar. She was deathly white, still trembling, and the brandy was real medicine.

"I know what you think of me," she said at last. "I don't blame you. But just let me show you something."

She unbuttoned the wrist of her blouse, baring her arm. It was black with bruises.

"You see now why I said it hurt when you caught my arm just now."

"Who did that? It must have been since this afternoon."

"Just two hours ago, done by a brute, my husband—yes, I am married—he twisted my arm and beat me till I told him where my money was, every penny of it. Perhaps you understand now."

"You mean——"

"I had had enough of it, slaving all day to earn more drink for him. And this time—to-night—he was just like a devil. Look at that bruise there, that was to get my last penny from me. No, no! No more home for me!"

She was more collected now.

"So that was why——"

"Yes, that was why. As soon as he was gone I came away as well, for good or evil, whichever way you look at it. I had to get a bed somehow—without a penny to pay for it. Well, what else can a woman do in London? Then, I thought, since I had to go to the bad, I might as well begin with some one that I liked, and who seemed to like me."

"Ravin!"

"Yes. Just my luck—whoever would have thought he kept a common lodging house!"

"Not quite that," said George, with a flicker of a smile. "Perhaps it has been all for the best. Don't you think after all you had better go back home?"

"Home! No, no! that's done with. You don't know my husband."

George suddenly understood. He remembered the limping figure at her door.

"Perhaps I do," he said.

"What? How?"

"Are you—is his name Wolseley Greville?"

"Why yes," she said excitedly. "Why then, you understand. You see I'm not the only one to blame. You know what a cad he is—oh, I could kill him!"

"Take care," said George, remembering the struggle on the cliffs of Dunnottar. "He might kill you."

"Time's up!" said the barman, turning out the lights.

They rose and walked along the street together. It was a clear moonlight night and the quiet air seemed to subdue her. He felt that she was calmer.

"We've got to make the best of things," he said. "You say you won't go back to your husband. I don't want you to go to the devil just yet, and it's getting late. You'll have to sleep at an hotel, and at this time of night the only kind of place that you could easily get into would be a station hotel. They will expect you to have some sort of luggage. So come along with me and let me lend you a travelling bag—something to save appearances."

"Yes, but how about the hotel bill? I am absolutely without a penny—dead honest!"

"My dear girl, I shall see you through. Let's see—one—two—three—four pounds seventeen and six. I can go to my bank to-morrow—this will do for you."

"What!" she said. "All that? After all you know of me?"

"Why yes, it's nothing."

For a minute or two she was silent. Then she said:

"You are a good sort. I wish there were more like you. But, I say, I can't do this."

"Do what?"

"Take this money without——"

"Without what?"

She stopped and faced him; then looked down.

He understood. A great temptation came upon him. Then he restrained himself.

"If you really wish to give me something for the money," he said, "you can do it this way. Tell me your story, the story of your life, without holding anything back—not like this afternoon—you were fooling us then. I'm a writer, you know, as well as an artist, and a real-life story is of use to me. I shan't ever give you away. Come now, there's a bargain. We shall be quits then."

She looked up in his face, evidently relieved.

"Where shall I begin?" she said.

"Wherever you like," he answered. "Just tell me what you remember. It will help to pass the time as we walk along to the street where I live."

They paced along slowly, side by side.

"He was a brute all through. I knew it when I married him, but he was rich—at least it seemed to me then—and he really married me. I wouldn't have done it else, and there was a baby—that was in Paris. He beat me almost from the first, but baby lived. Then he made me put her out to nurse, and when the woman wanted to adopt her, he made me agree—we had no money left. Then he deserted me. I had to live, and I was earning money as a model when he found me out. He is really not

altogether bad, but he has drinking fits and then he is the very devil."

"Never mind your husband. Tell me about yourself before you met him."

"Oh, then! I was such a silly thing."

She smiled and after a little hesitation poured out her tale so simply and so straightforwardly that he knew what she said was true.

"I never had much fun as a girl—there was too much work to do about the house—mother took in lodgers. Our neighbours were unkind and said things about mother and would not let the other girls have anything to do with me. But I was prettier than most of them and that made them jealous, so I had my revenge. And then I was fond of reading, not Shakespeare and that sort of person, but stories—did you ever read the *Family Herald Supplement*?—such as 'Across Her Path.' Oh, you would like them; at least I did. When I read those stories I felt I could live with earls and duchesses just as mother once had done. Mother had been a lady's maid, to real ladies with titles; she was once in Buckingham Palace. Then she met a Frenchman, quite well off, she said, who made love to her and married her secretly, or rather didn't marry her—that was the trouble. It seems there is a law that if a French Catholic—he was a Roman Catholic—marries an English Protestant without the consent of his parents, the marriage is not really legal. So when he had got tired of mother, he left her and me—an illegitimate.

"As far back as I can remember, we just took in lodgers, and I was the unpaid slavey as soon as I left school. Mother got into the habit of tippling, and if it hadn't been for me we shouldn't have been able to keep them. Some of them were really nice to me—took me to theatres, and sometimes to dances. Oh, I hadn't such a bad time now I come to think of it; but I did hate to have to take in nigger students, as we sometimes did. Then Wolseley came. I couldn't stand him at first, but he had such lots of money and treated me—you can't help liking a fellow when he

does that sort of thing. There were awful tales about him, so I kept on my guard. He tried to take advantage of me once, but I was too quick for him. Then he said he was sorry, and he seemed to be so well off, and—well, we were married, really and truly.

“I knew he was a rake, but that didn’t frighten me—I did not know what it meant. Now I do. You see, in the novelettes I used to read, it was as often as not supposed that ‘a reformed rake makes the best husband.’ The hero might be an earl, and might say to the heroine, ‘Dearest, it is but due to your pure heart that I should tell you of my hateful past. I have been a man as other men, a selfish citizen of the world, tarnishing with careless hand the gilded scutcheon of my Norman ancestors. It was not till I had met you in your innocent beauty that I realised the shame of my past life. Will you not raise me to your lofty pinnacle?’ Then the heroine tells him that she does not care to hear of his past, that she loves him for himself and himself alone, and believes in his promise of reform. I used to say to myself that when I could screw up Wolseley to the point I also could give him such an answer.

“He never mentioned his past, but he gave me a lovely diamond ring.

“Well, we were married.

“Then I found what a fool I had been.

“At first, just neglect; then blows. In spite of all I kept true to him. He had made me happy for a while, and even if he beat me it wasn’t worse than what I must expect if I were left alone. Mother was all fuddled now with drink. I had nowhere to go.

“Then he went to Paris. He might have gone alone, but he saw my market value—I had my good looks—he told me so quite frankly. Then baby came. That saved me for a little while, but we couldn’t afford to keep her, poor little thing. The life that followed was too awful to remember. His money was all gone and he threatened that if I didn’t—but I escaped from him, ran away back to London. I was getting on so well as a model when he

found me again. I kept him in drink, and then at last to-night—well, you know the rest.”

By this time they had reached the corner of his street.

“You had better wait here,” George said. “I shall fetch that bag and be back in a minute.”

When he returned, he said:

“You will find a few things in this that may be useful—brushes and so on. Sorry they are only men’s things. Now, shall we get a hansom?”

“All right. But tell me—which hotel? And shall I see you again soon?”

“I think Euston will do. As to meeting again, if I were you, I should leave London for a while, especially Chelsea. Ravin is sure to talk, even though I tell him your story. He is an unbelieving devil. You’ll find it difficult to get work then. Why not go to Paris for a while? You can surely find work there in the Latin Quarter. Write to me if you get stranded. I’m good for another ten pounds if you really need it. You know this street—seventeen is my number.”

“Thank you so much; I shall never forget your kindness.”

They found a hansom in King’s Road.

“Good-bye,” he said to her, and “Euston” to the cabby.

Two minutes later she was out of sight, and George returned thoughtfully to his rooms.

Ethel, however, was not yet at the end of her adventurous night. Her driver was not all too sober, and when they reached Sloane Square he had forgotten the address.

Opening the trap-door in the roof of the cab, he shouted:

“Shay, miss, where did the gentleman shay?”

“Euston,” said Ethel. “The hotel, not the station.”

“Sure he didn’t shay Victoria?”

“No, I tell you, Euston.”

“Aw right,” but he turned his horse towards Victoria.

“Stop!” she cried, rapping on the roof. “You’re going the wrong way. I said Euston.”

“But I shays Victoria,” replied the man.

Passers-by stopped to listen to the altercation. A policeman came up and Ethel appealed to him.

"Please tell the driver that it is Euston I want, not Victoria—he's half-tipsy."

"Wake up there, driver. I've got your number. Take this lady to Euston or there will be trouble."

"Euston be damned!" said the driver in a fury. "Gentleman shaid Victoria." And with that he suddenly lashed his horse.

The poor brute jumped forward, and Ethel, who was standing up on the front platform, was pitched out heavily into the street, falling on her head.

The policeman picked her up unconscious. When she came to her senses again she was lying in hospital with a nurse beside her, too weak to move.

"How long have I been here?" she said.

"Nearly a fortnight. Quiet, dearie!—take a sip of this soup. I knew you would turn the corner."

Gradually she collected her thoughts, and by the time the house-surgeon came to see her she was able to converse with him.

"Your husband has been here several times."

"No one else?"

"No, I don't think so. Nurse, has any one else called for Mrs. Greville?"

"Just Mr. Greville. He is coming again to-morrow. He has left a message for patient. I will bring it now if you like."

"No, let her sleep first. Give her this medicine. She must not be excited. Glad to see you looking so much better, Mrs. Greville. Yours was a nasty accident, but you'll soon be all right, and the mark won't show. The cut was under your hair and fortunately that is thick. Au revoir."

After the medicine she fell asleep again and did not wake up again till next morning. She was very much better.

"You can give her that letter, nurse," said the house-surgeon. "She's all right now. Only a matter of time."

"Such a nice gentleman your husband is," said nurse as she brought the letter. "He brings flowers every day for you."

"Read it to me," said Ethel.

"DEAREST ETHEL," it commenced,

"I have good news for you. A French lawyer has been here with reference to a will made by your late father. He has left you quite a large sum of money, and we shall be quite well off. Nurse tells me not to say too much for fear of exciting you. It was lucky that a friend of mine saw the accident, otherwise I might never have known where you were.

"Longing to see you again,

"Ever your loving

"WOLSELEY."

CHAPTER XVII

A LETTER FROM PARIS

GEORGE did not hear of the accident, and wondered why he had no message of any kind from Ethel. She might at least have sent a post card from Paris, or wherever she had gone. He told the whole story to Ravin, but Ravin only laughed at him.

"You very young and soft," he said. "She far too clever for you. Just you take care she don't try to blackmail you."

But after about two months a letter did come from her, and from Paris—an address near the Champs-Élysées:

"DEAR MR. GRANGE,—

"I am enclosing a money order for a hundred and twenty francs, together with the photograph of my little girl. I am keeping the bag, and hope that some day you will come to fetch it. In the meanwhile it reminds me of a debt I never can repay.

"You must wonder why I have been so long in writing. Perhaps you never heard of my accident, or again of my stroke of fortune. On that night after I left you, I was thrown out of the hansom in Sloane Square, and had concussion of the brain. While I was lying ill in hospital, my husband was called on by a French lawyer who was settling up the affairs of my late father. You remember I told you the story of my parents. Well, father died some months ago, and evidently he was sorry for what he had done and wished to make some reparation. He left a small allowance for my mother, and the rest of his money was to be settled on me. The only stipulation was that I should become a Roman Catholic. The interest amounts to over two thousand pounds a year. Wolseley

has been so nice to me ever since—quite a different man. As soon as I was fit to travel, he took me to the Riviera, and now we are in Paris. Wolseley wants me to go on the stage, and to buy sufficient interest in a small theatre so that he can be manager. He says it would be a good investment, and that it could be done on the money left me by my father. But that is not my ambition. I have made up my mind that my first duty is to find my own child again—the little girl about whom I told you. I don't know whether you believed my story—that is to say, the second story—but it was really true. I was really not a bad lot—what can a woman do in London who has no money and no home?

“So I am spending all my time here trying to trace my little girl. So far, I have had only one clue. The woman who adopted her seems to have done it for a purpose, to make money out of the child. She is known to have allowed the child to pose for artists, but in their private studios only, not in schools, and of course she keeps what is earned in this way. Latterly she has not been seen in Paris, and what I fancy has happened is that she is with the child at some studio in the country. I go all round the galleries and exhibitions looking to see if I can find a picture with a portrait of my darling, but it is almost a hopeless task. Paris is so huge.

“Sometimes I have thought that perhaps you could help me. You must see so many models, and perhaps she has gone to London. Perhaps some day you will come across my little girl. She must have grown to be just like me—she must be four years old now—but more Frenchified of course; so I send you a photograph of myself. I was eight years old when this was taken, but it is the only one I have. You remember I told you of my early days. I was fond of reading, and in this photograph I am holding a novelette—‘The Divided Way.’ Mine indeed has been a divided way, and I can only thank the blessed Virgin that I was saved from taking the wrong path, just in time, and by you.

“My only vexation is that Wolseley takes no interest in this search for my lost darling. He says it is a waste of time and money. But he is not drinking—this is a private letter, please remember—and I have promised that

a little later I will consider the matter of the theatre. But I certainly shall not act myself. I have no talent for the stage, and should only be a failure.

"Why don't you come to Paris and study here for a while? This is the real artists' city—you feel it in the air—so different from London, which is so sordid and so money-making. My father seems to have had quite a good collection of pictures, and Durand Ruel gave three hundred thousand francs for the lot. I like his galleries best of all. These modern pictures are so much more true than the old style of painting.

"We are living in a pretty little flat, and just below us is a girl, the mistress of a well-known senator. French morals are so different from ours in England. She is most respectable and very particular about the etiquette of her position. He may visit her, but she may not visit him. They go about together quite openly, and she has her victoria and her poodle—everything so chic. Wolseley says I ought not to recognise her, but I don't know any ladies here, so when he goes out by himself I often slip downstairs and gossip with her. She is so clever with her needle, and has made me two new hats.

"I often think of you and picture you in Mr. Ravin's studio. What a queer fellow he was! Of course that story about his Esquimau parents was too ridiculous. I knew at once you were playing a game with me. But why does he allow those ragamuffins to sleep in his studio at night? And that awful nigger! Ugh! how I hate all niggers. I told you how we used to have to take in nigger students sometimes when Mother and I kept lodgings. They used to make eyes at me and want me to go with them to the theatre. As if I would so demean myself!

"Poor mother! She is in a home now. The money that father left for her gives her a few more comforts than she otherwise might have had. But her case is hopeless. What a terrible thing this drink is!

"Well now, I have let my pen run on to a dreadful length. But really I have so few friends to write to. I wonder if you often get letters? Yes, you must—a man of your age must have had some love affair by this time. Well, I hope you have good luck.

"Write to me if you feel inclined. If you don't, I shall understand, and not be angry.

"Very sincerely yours,
"ETHEL."

George read the letter a hundred times, and a hundred times commenced to write. It was the only letter he had ever had from any woman, and it stirred him to the heart; but what he wrote was never satisfactory. So it was that Ethel never had an answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL

IT did not take George long to find out that his friend Ravin had a soft heart for Miss Marriott, the girl with auburn hair. Whether she responded was another matter. The Frenchman in a confidential moment confessed that he once asked her to marry him.

"But it no good," he said, swinging his arms. "She refuse me. I not know her well enough then, and she right. Now perhaps more chance, but I no money to marry. After all, it not matter. I easy find wife when I got money. I ask some friend to recommend me nice clean English girl, who not expect too much. No Frenchwoman for me! I know too well. You not need love for happy marriage."

George himself could never take his eyes off the girl.

The episode with Ethel had, moreover, had its influence on his character. The obsession of work had blinded him a little to our commoner humanity. But here in a moment he had come in touch with the passions, the impulse, frailty, tears and tenderness of that strange blend of flesh and blood called woman—something that could not be unhandled with cold judgment, whose charm seduced just as its viciousness repelled, whose spirit hovered, clung, enfolded after he had pushed the offending body from him. The disease of desire infected him, a disease from which no ascetic precaution, no inoculated virtue could ever make him safe.

Do not imagine that this infection perverted him, made him a liar, or Don Juan. Disease in him became uneasiness

of spirit, a softening of prejudice, sensuous development, delight in voluptuous music.

Twenty-one, and just growing into manhood—who can blame him?

Such a change of spirit could not but affect his work, his taste, his method. Without knowing why, he found a pleasure less in the realistic copying of things he saw than in luxurious colour, in the flow of line, in the charm of balance and of spacing in design, in sensuous decoration. These, after all, are but the voicing of a physical state.

George broke away from St. Margaret's, taking a studio where he could work more independently. The two hundred pounds sufficed for comfort. Models and materials absorbed half. The rest is enough for Chelsea.

This studio was one of a row in a building erected by a far-seeing model who found it more profitable to exact the rents than to accept the doles of art. Blücher Studios, they were called, the landlord having a quaint notion that the name suggested Prussian Blue. They differed from the neighbouring Mermaid Studios in not being infested by rats, but they had the disadvantage of being dominated by a teacher of music whose pupils bawled, or thumped an ancient piano all day long. The inhabitants of the studios would have bought an air-gun, but for the lucky accident that the musician owned a pretty daughter. Her smiles made them forgive some inconvenience.

Four other studios branched off the common passage, George's being the nearest on the right hand to the street. His three immediate neighbours were familiarly known as the World, the Flesh and the Devil, from their common appearance of being at war with mankind. They all wore long hair, brigand hats, and peg-top trousers, and were united in their predatory habits. Other people's brushes, tubes and kitchen utensils were really meant for them. The World walked with a swagger, the Flesh was round and fat, the Devil a sinister six foot.

A fourth and more palatial studio at the end of the passage was rented by a wealthy amateur whose name was

Clotter, but who had been nicknamed The Tootler, on the ground that he imitated Whistler. Clotter had not always aimed at such lofty ideals as those that he now misunderstood. It was Clotter who went to a colour-man and demanded Old Master brushes.

"Old Master brushes?" said the puzzled shopman.

"Yes, you know the brushes that the Old Master kind of picture was painted with. You see them in the portraits the artists did of themselves."

"Oh, certainly. Anything else this morning?"

"Yes, I should like some colours to paint a mist with."

"Any particular kind of a mist?"

"Yes, a Chelsea mist."

"Certainly, sir." And he charged accordingly.

By this time Clotter was a little wiser, even told the story against himself. But his smudges naturally made his neighbours laugh at him, unless they wished to borrow money. If Clotter painted Adam and Eve, these were drawn as in the picture before which a famous wit once said, "Sir, I deny that I am descended from that couple."

Clotter had a real respect for George, scenting a possible aristocrat behind so clean a collar. Not that George treated him with any more ceremony than the others. One day Clotter rushed into his studio.

"What do you think of this?" holding up his latest. "I think of calling it 'Nocturne.'"

"If I were you," said George, "I should call it 'Fugue in Brown Paper and Lamp Black.'"

"Really? Would you? Very good—Ha! Ha!"

As Sending-in Day for the Academy approached, excitement ran high. One after the other, the World, the Flesh and the Devil came to borrow paints, declaring that their master-pieces were at stake. Most excited of all was Clotter, who swaggered round saying that he meant to have a Show Sunday for his pictures.

Show Sundays were as yet beyond the purses and the dreams of the World, the Flesh and the Devil. They knew

from long experience that they would be "chucked," and shrank from advertising failure to friends who still believed in them. With Clotter it was otherwise. He had private lessons from an artist who lived by flattery, and being thus fortified Clotter meant to make the most of it. He had ordered refreshments from a Kensington caterer, with two hired footmen to prime the praise with stimulant. It was the Clotter nature also to parade, and not to invite one's poorer neighbours.

George alone received a card.

Being invited, though he never meant to go, George was suspect, and was excluded from the counsels of the worthy trio. All the same, he scented mischief, the Devil hinting that all Chelsea ought to come and see the fun.

At last came Show Sunday.

On the great day, when many a studio staircase creaked with impatient heels under petticoats that swished with curiosity, Blücher Studios presented a remarkable appearance. As George came down the street, he saw carriages on carriages, with footmen and cockades, herring-boxed as if it were St. George's, Hanover Square. A carpet had been laid at the entrance, and the entrance was sheltered by an awning. The mistake that Clotter made was to await his guests inside his own studio.

That error was the opportunity of his three pirate neighbours. Had he but placed a footman at the street door there might have been no tragedy. Clotter would have learned in time of a misleading placard over the entrance, which his enemies had placed after the first three carriages had arrived. This notice ran:—

REFRESHMENTS IN THE END STUDIO.

Clotter's studio, as has already been explained, was not the only one that opened on the passage, although to his undoing it was the end one. So it was that when the doors of his hated neighbours were thrown open, they too in-

vited inspection, and as the crowd surged in Clotter was in any case submerged.

The World was in his element. His Mermaid picture fetched these fashionable folk. On catching sight of George, he slipped away to warn him.

"The Tootler doesn't know our game," he whispered. "I have captured the art critic."

After delicate negotiation, Clotter had prevailed on a real live art critic to inspect his pictures, and for a week before this was his greatest brag. Yes, there was the critic! You could tell him from the angle of his nose against the paint and the notes upon his cuffs. George was beside him now, and could not refrain from curiously peeping. Four words were legible: "mystery—luminous—Whistler—Velazquez."

The critic was a comfortable-looking man. Art was an aid to his digestion. He saw George looking and seemed glad of the chance to show his mettle.

"Fine!" he said, half to George, half to the crowd. "Isn't it fine! Don't you think you could live there on that cliff, in a little cottage perched above the sea, watching the waves dashing in and the sea-gulls flying out to meet the coming storm?"

"No," said George. "I couldn't, for the simple reason that sea-gulls fly inland when there's going to be bad weather."

"There, there is atmosphere!" continued the undaunted expert. "Doesn't it smell of the sea!"

"Not a bit," said George. "It smells of 'turps.'"

"You have no soul."

All the studios were full, but, alas, in the case of Clotter's that placard at the entrance had done its devilish work! The visitors in the end studio were there only for the refreshments.

The World, the Flesh and the Devil each had talent, and an amateur with an eye to the future took this chance to buy from each a picture.

The one Duchess whom Clotter had been able to secure betrayed the secret.

"Mr. Clotter," she lisped, "I see that yours is not like the Feast of Cana. You do keep your worst to the last. You naughty, irreligious man! And did you really, really paint her from the life?—I mean that fascinating mermaid in the first room—Oh, I understand now why you have become an artist!"

Clotter shivered.

It was the World who painted mermaids.

Could the Duchess have strayed into that bounder's studio by mistake?

As the guests thinned down, he hurried out into the passage.

Too true! His guests had been captured by the Devil—and the Flesh!—and the World!

The three knaves were honest enough to confess the trick, even to offer him a commission on their sales. But Clotter never forgave them. Not long afterwards he took another studio in the more select, if less artistic, atmosphere of Grosvenor Square.

George soon followed suit, not to Grosvenor Square, but to a studio which was nearer the house in which Miss Marriott lived.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TEMPTATION OF MISS MARRIOTT

MISS MARRIOTT sat to George two days a week. Catching her one day in a particular light, he had got an idea which he wished to work out. In the meanwhile he drew and painted from her in every sort of pose, concentrating on increase of speed. Just now he thought the fresh impression of a day the best of all, and his ambition was to complete a canvas in one rapid working. To do that, he must be unhindered by a lack of skill or accidents of light.

Summer might grow never so sultry, but green fields and cool sea breezes were forgotten in this fair young presence. One call from the North made George waver for a moment. This was a letter from Mrs. Middleton, written from Stonehaven:

“DEAR GEORGE,—

“Whenever I pass a certain garden and see the roses bloom upon the wall behind the hollyhocks and larkspur, I think of my young artist friend and wonder if I shall ever see him again. Nathaniel Reid has gone to Orkney for the summer, but he writes that you are not with him. Is there anything that prevents you from staying with us at Stonehaven? Kate has recently met her fate, and she and Elsie are both visiting the family of the beloved. The Doctor has a poor appetite and will not look even at my apple jelly. My cooking is wasted and the two empty rooms lie on my conscience. One could be your bedroom and the other your studio—it has a north light—sacred from all intrusion provided you spare an occasional evening to gossip with an old woman. The same sea air blows in, the same wild flowers nod along the paths by the cliffs at

Cowie and Dunnottar, the heather blooms as ever on Cairn-mon-Earn—I can promise you a fisherman as weather beaten as the last—bring a model with you if that is the hindrance, but do come!

“The winter has been so busy that I had little time to write, though you were often in my thoughts. I feel old and tired and glad to have this breathing space. Time has no pity on a woman of my age. She feels the years creeping in and cannot escape them. A man can grow young with new interests, but a woman has her hearthstone round her neck.

“What have you been reading lately? I have a set of Tolstoi waiting for you here, he is my latest and greatest. He makes me feel how small one human soul is in this complex world. What a fascinating country Russia must be!

“But it is not Russia that calls you now. It is Scotland and dear old Stonehaven. ‘Dark and true and tender is the North.’

“Won’t you come to us?

“Ever your affectionate friend,

“AGNES MIDDLETON.”

At any other time George would have taken the next train from Euston, but just now invisible chains tied him to the city.

“Would you like to go to the country for a while?” he asked Miss Marriott. “To a seaside village on the north-east coast of Scotland? I spent last summer there and have an invitation from an old lady. She says I may bring a model, and that might very well be you.”

“Thank you, I’d rather not,” she replied. “You may think it odd, but I cannot bear the country. It is too quiet, and I should be ill in a week. Unless I can see lots of people passing my window, I am miserable. I want the shops and the bright restaurants to distract me. I once went to a farm with Mr. Ravin and never felt so unhappy in my life. I could not sleep at nights because of the quiet, and every one in the place thought me an abandoned creature—the men were impudent, the women

insolent. Here in London I am lost in the crowd and forget myself in the busy streets."

"But don't you ever want to go back to Nature?"

"No," she answered. "Nature is too cruel."

She was inflexible, and George wrote back to Mrs. Middleton that this year he could not come. He hesitated to give the reason and pleaded the pressure of work. In his heart he was ashamed that he could not break away. Was this beginning to be a love affair? No! No!—she belonged to Ravin.

If Mrs. Middleton stood reproached by her empty rooms, George felt guilty every time he read Millet's text still hanging by his bed-side. The charm of the country indeed had faded before this insidious glamour. He excused himself to himself by saying that Ravin must be his Master since Reid was away, but all the while he knew it would be more sensible to stay at the sea-side with an old woman than drag along in the hot city behind a young one's petticoats.

Yet London was not without its summer charm, and in the early morning the sweet pale light romanced upon the house-tops and round the brim street palings with just as much translucent beauty as on a Scottish brae. The river with its pearly mists and slow, perpetual traffic cast its never failing spell. North of London there were foot-path rambles, from Pinner and Northwood and Rickmansworth to Amersham and Chesham and Beaconsfield, or from Wendover, crossing the Icknield Way over the Chilterns to Princes Risboro. Here he made acquaintance with a secluded farm-house which in summers to come was to give him refuge from the too strenuous life of London town.

Mrs. Middleton up in Stonehaven sighed when she read George's polite regrets. "It is not work alone that keeps him," she said to herself. "It is some young woman. May she be worthy of that dear, innocent young lad!"

So till September the world was grooved. Then Ravin plunged one day into George's studio.

"I got it!" he shouted. "Come on. We go on the bust."

"Got what?"

"The commission. Don't I tell you? Ah, I forgot—the American who see my picture at the New Gallery. He give me commission to decorate his house—ten thousand dollars and all expenses. I chuck my black and white. Hooray!"

"Where is it? Here or in America?"

"Oh blow! I forgot to ask. But I think Boston. He give me the address."

Out of his waistcoat pocket he produced a crumpled card.

"You must get more than that," said George. "Make him sign a contract in proper form. Get your out-of-work solicitor to draw it up for you. It's a long way to Boston."

"You right! Come on. I stand you a dinner. I send telegram to Miss Marriott to come to Frascati. She's a breeck wall, and we drink champagne. Oh blow! I have no money. You lend me to-night and we all bust together, *hein?*"

"What about Peter?" said George as they went out.

"Petaire? Oh, he leave me last week. You see my drawing of hop-pickers. Well, I come back to my studio one night and I see Petaire looking at the drawing. He not tidy nothing up all day. 'What blazes you no clean my studio?' I say. Petaire no answer but mumble, mumble. 'Speak up, will you, or I punch your head,' I say. 'Look 'ere, gov'nor,' he say, 'I'm on strike, I ain't got no call for work. Free-born British subjick, that's wot I am. Off to the country, I am, to pick 'ops and 'ear the bloomin' lark.' I laugh and kick him into his corner. But in the morning he take my best bowler and my silk 'andkerchief and pretend he wipe away tear, and he say, 'Good-bye, gov'nor, adoo.' I never see him again. Poor Petaire, he starve in the country and die. Never mind, we go on the bust."

They waited for Miss Marriott at a table near the entrance; then when she came, went upstairs to the table d'hôte.

During coffee, the orchestra played the Barcarolle from the Tales of Hoffman. George listened, while the other

two chatted quietly, closer in spirit than they had ever been before.

"Don't forget," George heard the Frenchman say. "The invitation still holds good, if ever you will come."

The answer was lost in music.

Miss Marriott was certainly less beautiful than Ethel. The chin was a trifle heavy and the nose tip-tilted. But for that blaze of hair one might not notice her. Then, unlike Ethel, she had modesty, or else its excellent counterfeit. She was one to be wooed, not to waylay, and even after seeming invitation she would repel half-way. If she were for love, she would enjoy it as an episode—not drain the cup.

Yet there was passion too behind those eyes, unless perhaps George just imagined it. His thought ran often in this groove, and he may have found in her eyes the mirror of his own.

If he had not felt that she already half belonged to Ravin, he might have felt inclined to flirt and test her. Still, he had a curious wonder as to what might happen if she did not make some compact with the Frenchman ere he left.

Apparently there was no compact.

"She say she still not have me," said Ravin, after they had seen her home. "Ah, perhaps for the best. She good girl, but marriage all toss up. Pretty women change so when they marry. And she is a model."

"I couldn't fancy her domesticated."

"Wait till you in love yourself, my boy. You fancy anything then. You dream of babies and bottle-milk."

"Look here, old chap," said Ravin as they parted, "you look after her for me and see she get work. I leave money with you for her so that you can pay her sitting."

"I can manage without. But how if I fall in love with her myself?"

"Oh blow! I take risk."

Sublime confidence! Living as they both did in a Bohemian world, their two young heads constantly together, this artist with his warm young blood, this model with

her retroussé but so charming nose—they might so easily have gone a little farther.

After Ravin left the two days a week on which Miss Marriott had first arranged to sit to George grew into every day. This might have been to keep her out of mischief, for the model who must ask for work has more temptation than the model who is in demand. But to all appearance it was mutual desire, for it was she that first suggested it, and George was glad to take the offer.

"It isn't a matter of money," she said. "You can pay me what you choose. I like sitting to you and I hate cadging around for work. If I bore you, just fire me out, and if I stay you mustn't flirt with me—these are my only conditions."

They were sitting in the little studio when she said this, sucking oranges. A smile lit George's face.

"All right," he said, "and if you will excuse my natural irreverence, we shall call this place the Ark of the Covenant."

It was an apt name. The little whitewashed studio with its pointed roof was just what any ark might be.

As to the covenant, it was sacred just so long as she cared to keep it. George was in the mood of youth which tastes the fruit unquestioning if it only falls before him.

She was much best company when he flattered. She was no angel, but a woman.

Every day she grew to be more useful to him and more charming. She always knew exactly what he wanted, and never shammed fatigue—not at all like the blasé model who is thinking only of her money's worth. Miss Marriott had an endless flow of small-talk, inexpensive oil that somehow makes the world run smooth.

A clever talker too when they got on to deeper themes.

She did what little housekeeping the studio needed, darned George's socks, and danced him round in the world of music; for she could play, this charming creature of uncertain age, not at all badly. Where she had picked it up George never learned. Judging from her own ac-

counts, her childhood had been perched an ace above starvation, with just one push between the pavement and the gutter. Perhaps she slurred the intricate passages of life. Perhaps she found the elusive made the best romance.

Wherever she had picked it up, George found her playing such a pleasure that the piano he had hired was bought. They went to concerts together, the tickets for which were the only presents that she let him give her.

Then she sang too—delicate old English melodies by such as Purcell and Dr. Arne. These she transposed to her contralto, not trained, but wonderfully tender.

What could have been her history? George found the casual links hard to fit together. A little, a very little schooling, a good deal of the stage as understudy, a year as a companion, a friendship with a woman artist now submerged in marriage. Then a long, sad row of years in studios, posings and hopeless ambitions. Never a home that she cared to remember.

He was too shy to use her Christian name, so why record it?

No, George never was in love; but very near it sometimes.

One night when he had seen Miss Marriott to her door after a delightful concert, he felt so unsettled, so disturbed by fear lest he must soon go further with the girl that he delayed returning to his studio at once, and walked excitedly along the King's Road, trying to collect his thoughts.

"Hullo!" said a familiar voice, bringing him back to earth.

A tall figure leaning against a lamp-post held out a hand, which George mechanically shook.

"Hullo!" he said; "why, Shanks! of all men!"

"Yes, sir," said Shanks a trifle indistinctly, "Shanks it is, that semi-celebrated artist."

"How's the world using you? What have you been doing?"

"Doing?" said Shanks, laying a heavy hand on George's shoulder. "Grange, my boy, I'm drunk. Take me home."

Yes, drunk he was, and unfortunately lamp-posts do not walk, so George unwillingly supported the unsteady footsteps of his former fellow-student to the address that Shanks was still sober enough to remember. As they staggered along, Shanks soliloquised on Women.

"Women, my boy, are millstones round our necks. They sink us in a sea of whisky. Take it hot, my boy—gets there soonest. Long pull, strong pull, and pull all together. Yes, my boy, good old Scotch—where you come from. Gi'e me your hand, ol' chap. I admire the Scotch—they are great drunkards. I admire Glasgow whisky school, I admire passionately. But I hate women. Damn women! I'm a father, old f'la, with babies—two—two—two."

He held out two fingers idiotically.

Fortunately it was not far to Shanks's lodgings. A young woman answered the door as soon as he rang the bell.

"Bring him in," she said, and shuffled off, without waiting, into a room at the end of the passage.

It was evidently Shanks's home, for he waved his hand feebly in her direction; so George guided him in.

He found himself in a miserable room, only half-warmed by a wretched fire. The young woman had her back to them and was leaning over a cradle, hushing a baby to sleep. Another child sat on the floor, sucking a piece of coal and staring solemnly at Shanks.

"Take off his boots and put him in the bed," said the woman, still without turning round.

With some difficulty George succeeded.

It was not till he said good night that she turned round to face him.

It was a face he recognized, the face of a once pretty, witty model.

"Miss Butler!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Miss Butler still," she said in a hard voice. "He does me the honour to let me share his licence, not his name. Art must have no impediments. Genius must not be fettered. Genius may get drunk on a model's sav-

ings, ruin her reputation and her figure, damn her for her babies, curse her as an incubus. Well, perhaps genius is right. If one had not genius, how could one get pictures hung upon the Line or at the Salon? And if there were not pictures hung upon the Line, how could the world go round. Where were you? *Six Bells*, I suppose. Did he spend it all?"

"I met him in the street," said George. Then, as a thought flashed, added, "He knew he was incapable and asked me to bring him home. He also told me to take care of his money for him." So saying, he emptied a pocket of its silver.

She looked at him incredulously, but he met her gaze.

"Good night," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good night," she said, a tear falling down her cheek. "You are all right."

As he went along the passage she ran after him.

"You, whoever you are—I forget your name—don't tell any one of this. I didn't mean half what I said. I know he'll marry me yet. He's just got an appointment as a teacher up in Manchester, that's what he went out to celebrate. We'll pay you back some day. We will—we will."

"Nothing to pay," said George good-naturedly. "Don't be too hard on old Shanks. Put on your pretty face again and he'll marry you quick enough. Send me some of the wedding cake."

He left her laughing.

But next day Miss Marriott found him less inclined to jest.

Who could have thought that the pretty, witty Florrie Butler, the favourite model at St. Margaret's, could sink so soon into a wretched slut! The wit was now a bitter sarcasm, which two more years of poverty and drink might make intolerable Billingsgate. Florrie Butler never dressed in the height of fashion, though she did not flop around from studio to studio in the shapeless sacque that so many Chelsea models are content with. She had a temper—one remembered that—and always stood up for

what she called her rights, when there was a draughty window or an over-heated stove or a student who suggested that she had changed her pose.

Shanks, the woman-hater, had never shown his interest at the time—mysterious beggar! Well, he had somehow caught her, or she had captured him—one had not heard his side of the story. The woman gets the blame, and as often as not deserves it.

Imagine Shanks, the woman-hater, faced in his hours of ease with "babies and bottle-milk." No wonder he took to drink!

Yet it was hard on the mother, mother now of two.

George wondered what sort of wife or mother Miss Marriott would make. Would she be careless in dress, demand a nurse and servants, hamper an artist-husband, or would she remain Bohemian?

He realized his ignorance of what she really was. To marry or to mate with her was gambling.

He would study her more closely. The more he studied her, the more he thought of Ravin, the friend who really had the right to her.

Yes, she was domesticated enough for Ravin—would keep him in order, hold the purse and run him on more business lines. She was not too strenuous or ambitious—just content to live and keep things tidy.

And she had not forgotten Ravin; indeed, she probably thought more of him in his absence. She liked to hear George tell how the Frenchman helped him in his work, how if he painted such and such a way it was because Ravin told him so.

Yet George was doing wonderfully well, and if Miss Marriott had realised that he was merely in the making and that for all his youth he had the right stuff in him, she might have played out different cards.

Ravin wrote regularly, and his letters were well read.

She liked the theatre, and in this George humoured her.

"Is it comedy or tragedy to-night?" she asked once, as they waited in the queue.

"Everything is comedy to you," said George, smiling, "even a man's heart."

"I mean, do they marry and live happily ever after?"

"I hope so. I hate plays that leave a brown taste in the mouth."

"Oranges, juicy oranges, just like wine!" cried a hawker.

"Whenever I think of marriage," she said, "I think of one of my friends. She had twelve younger sisters, and on her eighteenth birthday felt they were so thick upon the ground that she accepted her first proposal."

"*Come Kiss Yo' Baby, In Old Madrid, The Better Land*, all for the low price of twopence," cried another hawker.

"Rags that cover happiness," said George, pointing to him.

"Buy a *Star*," cried yet a third, "for the lady's feet, sir. Damp ground, sir, on this 'ere bloomin' earth."

The ticket-office opened for the crush.

"How unreal she is," Miss Marriott said of the heroine after the first act. "I'm sure the play must be written by a woman."

"Why?"

"Only another woman could have thought her possible."

"You think that women can do things, not write about them?"

"Just as they pose better than they paint."

"Then man is useful after all, if only to interpret womanhood?"

"I can't argue like you. Buy me some chocolate."

"You are the most off-at-a-tangent person I ever met," said George. "When I want a model for Inconsistency I shall send for you."

"Before you are old enough to tackle such a subject, I shall be married and pose no more."

"Inconsistent again!"

"How?"

"You told me once you would rather drown yourself than marry."

On the way back from the theatre they were very confidential, and George saw a chance of testing her.

"This is excellent chocolate."

"Suppose I married a model," he said. "What would you say?"

"*Now*, do you mean, or a year after the marriage?"

"Whichever you like. Say a year after."

Danger twinkled in her eyes.

"A year after! Well, I should say, 'You wore a rather stylish coat a year ago, trousers turned up and hair parted in the middle; quite superior kind of chap, don't you know. Possibly a very good match for a very good model.'"

"Is that all?"

"Well," pursued the tormentor, "if I told the truth, I should say that you had married to save money and she married to get it, and you both miscalculated."

"Cruel! Now, look here," he said, taking her arm. "Suppose I asked you to marry——"

"Don't—don't spoil it all. We've been such friends."

"Hold on!" said George, smiling. "I haven't finished the sentence. As I was saying, suppose I asked you to marry old Ravin?"

She flushed hotly.

"I'm sorry," she stammered. "Forget what I said."

"No," said George. "I won't forget. You need a talking to. Here are we two as thick as thieves, trying to steal each other's hearts—and we can't. Why can't we? There's only one reason. There's another fellow in the way."

"No, there isn't," she said. But that blush!

"I'm going to book a passage for you to America."

"No, no," she said. But when he turned her round to look into his eyes, it was "All right!" that she whispered.

As they walked along George asked her why she had at first said "No" to Ravin.

"Do you remember," she answered, "what you once called that girl Swallow?"

"I think I do," said George, laughing. "I called her a silly little fool."

CHAPTER XX

DISHEARTENED

AS he drooped out of Waterloo station one might have thought that Miss Marriott had taken all George's hope of happiness away with her. For all he knew, she was the last of his friends. Ravin was now more than ever likely to settle in the new land.

The three years George had spent in London had left him still to himself.

Should he go back to Aberdeen? No, London raged in his blood. He hungered for the crowd. And yet in that crowd his solitude seemed cried out by the very stones. As he came across Westminster he passed two constables swinging to the Hospital with a stretcher from which came bitter groans—the face invisible. An accident, no doubt, but in that neighbourhood a poor man's misery turned heads away less out of pity than in revolt against unpleasantness. Crossing the road George himself barely escaped a like fate at the wheels of some reckless driver. How many would have followed him to hospital?

Victoria Street was a maze of vehicles. He turned aside, to pass a yet greater maze of lights, flaring in a narrow lane. Here were the hucksters of a thousand odours, stale fish and mangy meat, vegetables that must have matured as mattress in overcrowded tenements, greasy organ-grinders, verminous old clothes—the poverty of hideous marketing. Here was an underworld that knew no beauty. The costers might be foreigners or English. He was an alien among such aliens. It must have been in such a street that Ravin got the subject for that pastel—with those flaring lights—only the coffin left out!

He hurried away.

Despair sits in King's Road gnawing the hearts of solitary men.

These are moments in our life when we are lifted outside ordinary thought and action to find ourselves in touch with the infinite. Sometimes this is under shadow of night, when we waken trembling at the judgment seat. Two hours ago we may have been immersed in some absorbing work which seemed the be-all and the end-all of existence. Now we see how small that work is. Twenty, thirty, forty years have passed, and to what end? The world might very well have done without us.

Such a moment fell on George as he sat in his studio that evening. He was sunk in sudden fear, of his empty life, of failure. For what had been his career? At school a nobody, at College insignificant. In that first session at King's College he had really worked his hardest, and yet how poor had been his place on the list. Then in a moment of pique he had thrown up classics and gone in for art. What a gamble! Without the least experience or the least knowledge of life, without any testing of his talent, he had taken the word of a chance stranger and plunged into a new career. Up there in the North it seemed as if he had entered a serener air. Indeed half the charm of an artist's life had in those days come from the seeming lack of competition. Here, he had thought, was a life without examinations, without the hurry and rush of rivalry, where a man could work at his will in his own way, till at last he arrived.

And now when he came to see the life of the real artist, how different it was! It was the same old struggle for place. Take the case of Ravin, strong in drawing, tender in his colour, for ever beset by duns, forced to do work that he disliked so that he could pay his rent, almost unknown to fame simply because he had no time or opportunity to do big things. Yet Ravin was a comparative success. There were dozens of good artists who never sold a picture, dozens who were driven to commercial art so that they

might live, and living at last as slaves *sans* hope and *sans* ambition.

Then take his own work. For three years he had worked heart and soul, and what had been his progress? He was merely on the threshold, a beginner. True, he could draw a figure now that looked like something human, but when it came to landscape he was no further yet than he had been two years ago.

Was he doomed to mediocrity? Had he not better go back to his books before it was too late? After all, he had had some knack of turning verses and he could write fair prose. Why not write?

Then he remembered the rejected manuscripts and sickened again. No, there was no easy road to fame. The writer had a training to go through as hard as that of artist or of scholar. There must be another three more years of schooling, and at the end he must still be a beginner.

Beginner! That was what old Reid had called himself and had not been ashamed. Poor old Reid, what a fine friend he was. Why did he never write?

Thinking of Reid made him think of the talks they used to have together. They had once discussed the latest author of the last sensation. Those were the early kailyard days, and this novel was the kailest kail, romance in a manse. The author's movements were chronicled in literary small talk, one learned from illustrated interviews the name of his pet dog and the colour of his tie. He wore the halo of the immortals.

Reid was full of ridicule.

"Hoots, mon," he snorted, "what does a young blether-skite like you know about life. Why, he's only twenty."

Only twenty! And George was twenty-one.

The thought gave him courage again. He rose and paced the studio.

"Damn it all," he said aloud. "There's time enough yet."

All next winter he was eyes and hands and brushes. Forgetfulness came easiest through work.

CHAPTER XXI

VARNISHING DAY

THE day before she left for America Miss Marriott had gone over with George all the pictures he had made with her as model. Half of them she made him burn. Two she told him to send to the Academy, one in particular, showing her at an open window, her red-gold hair luminous in the shadow, and a gleam of sunlight shimmering on a pale green shawl upon her shoulders. There was something eerie in the eyes of her—"fairylike" one might have said, another, "more like a witch."

"What shall I call it?" he asked.

"Call it 'Portrait of a Wicked Woman,' " she answered, laughing.

The incident recurred to his memory one day the following February, when he received an unexpected call from two of the Directors of the New Gallery.

"We have just had a letter from Mr. Ravin in America, recommending us to come and see your pictures," they explained. "We always like to keep our eyes open for new talent. Of course, you understand this visit does not commit us to accept any of your pictures. As a matter of fact, we have very little spare room this year."

George was somewhat overcome, but naturally delighted at the opportunity. They seemed attracted by the window picture.

"That's one we should like," they said after a whispered consultation.

"I had meant that for the Academy."

Nothing could have been more fortunately said. They were determined to have it now.

"This is a typical New Gallery picture," they urged. "It would be lost at the Academy—one of two thousand."

Reluctance, however well assumed, had to succumb to such entreaties. They were inquisitive about the title he had written on the back, but when he told them it was given him by the author no more was said.

And so to the New Gallery it went.

He still had one other excellent portrait of Miss Marriott for the Academy. This he submitted with his picture of Dunnottar Castle. The landscape was rejected, but he got his Varnishing Ticket for the portrait.

Sunshine sparkled in that bit of cardboard. Favouring no clique either for or against the Academy, he was elated at such early recognition. And his best had been accepted.

The good news was cabled to the friends at Boston.

On Varnishing Day Burlington House opened at nine, but George had cut himself shaving and thought himself unpresentable till ten. Needless solicitude! He mounted the stairs unknown and unnoticed. The rooms were already filled, workmen jostling about with tall ladders.

"Too low in tone," he muttered when he saw his picture; then realized that this was due to the MacWhirter near it. He was not on the Line, though well enough hung in the third room.

On the right, a little old man was painting for dear life, surrounded by bottles, powders, oils, varnishes and mediums—a very chemist's shop. Determined that *his* pictures should last for all time, he mixed his own colours. So minute was his brush that it seemed to hold but a single hair. Vast sighs were drawn with each microscopic alteration. George knew him by his work—a giant of thirty years ago, now the laughing-stock of the up-to-date.

"Poor old man!" he thought. "May I be as sincere at his age!"

There on the top of a ladder an artist flicked sunlight into a landscape that looked—yes, was a Mark Fisher. Skied!

And there, in a dark corner, an Aumonier. Ah, Frank Bramley!

Passing into the fourth room he noticed that some one had stopped to look at the "Portrait of a Lady."

With a leap of the heart he recognized Orchardson. Of all the portrait painters of the day Orchardson, in his eyes, stood first.

Glued to three yards, George haunted the Academician. At last—but Orchardson moved on.

Still, he had stood there quite five minutes.

There stood the fine old President, button-holed by a lady who wished to drag him to the Gem Room, and there a grey picture that must have come from Newlyn.

"Wet-cat painting!" said some one, laughing, surely Herkomer.

A mass of paint and brag and velvet jackets and frock coats and smocks and "Seen my picture?" and "Where are you, old chap?" and "Skied again!"

Although he spoke to no one, it was the first day for eight months that George did not feel lonely. To-day his comrade was Success.

For a week the circulation of every London journal went up by one. On Saturday a paper called the *Cynic* ruined his appetite with this:

"Mr. Grange contributes a Portrait of a Lady who is not a lady, in colours that are colourless. Evidently a disciple of the Glasgow School, conceived in fog and nurtured in futility. Near it is a MacWhirter, painted with our celebrated garden hose, etc. etc."

Three Press Cutting Agencies sent him the same information, offering to supply him with more at a guinea a hundred.

A happier proof of recognition arrived a week later in a curious epistle, which ran as follows:

"Church Road, Chelsea.

May 21, 1893.

"WELL-BORN SIR,

"Owing to unforeseen concatenation of circumstances, I have myself of calling on you the pleasure restrained.

Your extraordinary striking portrait of a dame in the Academy, which a friend me noticeable made, conduces to this letter. The relationship which I to propose to you the honour have, requires private interview. When you the hour name, will I await your distinguished orders.

“EBERHARD GRUNDSTEIN.”

Grundstein? That was the name on the Old Curiosity Shop he had often noticed, in the windows of which was always something of interest—fine old Sheraton cabinets, French clocks, Oriental armour. Old Masters were occasionally to be seen, also pictures by the Barbizon men, rather disappointing. The collection of miniatures was first-rate, and included Cosways and Samuel Coopers. At any rate it was not like another shop quite close in which he had once seen the legend,

Two Genuine Oil Paintings—7s. 6d. Nearly New!

It would be interesting to know the writer—a Jew from his name—but what could be the relationship he proposed?

George was in no mood for work that morning, so, putting the letter in his pocket, he started for Mr. Eberhard Grundstein.

When the young artist was ushered in, Mr. Eberhard Grundstein sat in an easy chair, his bandaged leg placed on a rest. This private room was delightfully cool and airy, the neutral distemper showing off the pictures on the walls to great advantage. A fire-place with copper dogs and stencillings and enamel struck one as rather too “arty,” but at any rate it was the room of a man of taste. Mr. Eberhard Grundstein showed little sign of his Hebrew extraction, except perhaps in the beady eyes and in the underlip that occasionally caressed the grey moustache. A retired officer, one might have thought.

That might account for the old armour, for the rapiers, scimitars, pistols, Waterloo knapsacks, helmets, shakos, the thousand and one discarded weapons and costumes displayed downstairs. Here, however, in Mr. Grundstein’s

sanctum, peace reigned supreme. Landscapes and fair dames of 1790 were at any rate his present fancy.

"Please to excuse me, my gentleman," said Mr. Grundstein, laboriously. "I have the gout and an accident experienced. Ach, Potztausend! I have a twinge. You are for the first time in the Academy exposed, not true? I never remark you before. That is why I you written have. I interest myself in young artists. Will you please take place?"

"What wonderful armour you have," said George, nervously turning the conversation away from himself. "I never saw a better collection of Cromwell's time."

"Ah, it is very good imitated, not true?"

"Imitated!"

"Pardon, I do not know—it is so difficult to tell—perhaps it is genuine; but we have not yet a history for it found. Man must so careful be."

"But surely," exclaimed George, "it had all the traces of rust cleaned off, and dents, as if from use in battle. Besides, the shapes were true. I am interested in that period myself. That's why I know."

"Ah so, you interest yourself for armour. Very good! But there are unbelievable many forgeries. Think you only! The armour in your Tower of London is nearly all forgery. Only three suits genuine, I think. Ah so, you believe it not. Perhaps you have right."

"How could it be so in a National collection?"

"I know not. But I think willingly the private collections of former military governors see, not recent, of course—we are all honest now—but of those who are dead. But that is not our affair. It concerns the Government. Do you believe, I have in South Kensington Museum a French cabinet last week seen which is fabricated, I am sure? Man says it is fifteenth century, and the wood is truly old, even the nails are old, but after my meaning it was by a friend of mine in Paris made. Ah, but you are painter! What think you of my pictures?"

"I have not examined them carefully," said George. "I

am mostly interested in modern artists. But I often look at the miniatures in your window."

"Ah, I am known then?" said Grundstein, holding George with his eyes. "Will you open that drawer there? I have a case of Cosways. So! How do you find them?"

"Stunning!" said George. "But—but—surely some one has been fooling about with them—that touch is not Cosway's. Why! the drawing of the chin has been lost!"

"What then? You have it noticed? You have clever eyes, young gentleman. But I tell you, these have been by a great miniature painter touched up."

"Maybe!" said George testily. "But he's a bungler. It's a shame to ruin these master-pieces."

"Please, please, take it not ill, my good young gentleman. And if he does touch up a little freshly, know you not that the great Cosway also Old Masters touched up? Perhaps it is retribution. I tell you that this artist more money by this touching up makes than by his own painting!"

"Then he ought to have his throat cut."

"Potztausend! Donnerwetter nochmal! Ach! I have another twinge. Please to excuse me. Ah, do you know, the dealers to-day do not like modern art? You have not your picture in the Academy sold, you?"

"No," said George. "But you can add it to your collection for fifty guineas."

Eberhard Grundstein laughed heartily.

"You are for business, that can man see. But it can be that I others of your pictures buy. But later will we of that speak. Fifty guineas! Do you know I pay no more for that picture there?"

"What! That Gainsborough!" said George, going up to a picture facing him. "No, it's not his, after all, but it's like a Gainsborough, whoever it's by."

"Ah, so, you find it good. He is—he was a very clever artist. I have another picture by him for the same price bought. Then a dealer in Bond Street has bought it. This artist was also a picture restorer. After some years

he went to restore a picture by Romney in the collection of a millionaire. He found this so-called Romney was his own picture. Now my friend the artist had wife and family, and he said nothing. He restored his own picture and got seventy guineas. So you see he makes plenty of money. But about my pictures. What think you of my Constable?"

George examined a picture painted largely with palette knife.

"Pretty middling," he said shortly. "Besides, it's not a Constable."

"Ach! Du lieber Gott! Potztausend! Donnerwetter nochmal! Bomben and Gr-r-renaden! Please to excuse me. I have another twinge. Ah so, you say it is no Constable? Why think you so?"

"Because," said George quietly, "the paint is not yet dry. Now, look here, Mr. Grundstein, I can't see what you are driving at. What did you want to see me about?"

"Ah so, we come to business now. Is the door shut?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"You speak too fast, my good young gentleman. Please take place. I have a proposition. I have with great pleasure your picture seen. It is with freedom and extraordinary knowledge painted. You see that picture which you have for a Gainsborough mistaken. That also is with freedom and knowledge painted, but not so cleverly as yours. I have also remarked that your picture in the Academy unsold remains. I offer you fifty guineas for it and for many other pictures which, under certain conditions, I shall order. But they must more after the style of Gainsborough or Romney be. It is easy to learn. You are clever. I pay cash. What think you?"

George walked slowly to the door without answering.

"I make it seventy guineas. Not true, it is an excellent relationship? What say you?"

"Go to hell!" said George.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE LADDER OF FAME

IT was, however, the New Gallery picture which threw our hero into the limelight.

He had been out in the country for a few days, and before returning to his studio went to dine at his usual restaurant. Hardly had he sat down when an acquaintance came across the room and handed him an evening paper, saying, "You've done it now."

"ACTRESS SUES ARTIST FOR SLANDER. LIBEL BY PAINT.

We are informed by Messrs. Goddard and Goddard, solicitors for Miss Kitty Dunlop, the well-known variety actress, that they have been instructed to take proceedings against Mr. George Grange, an artist, on account of his picture at the New Gallery, entitled "Portrait of a Wicked Woman," which their client considers a grave and malicious libel on her character."

"Miss Kitty Dunlop! Who the devil is she?"

"Come now, don't be so innocent. It will never do to plead that in court. She's the very latest thing in London—chief turn at the Tivoli—and she's got her knife into you, my son."

"Never met her in my life!"

"Perhaps not under that name," said the other. "You never can tell who an actress really is."

Sudden suspicion flashed through George's mind. Could Kitty Dunlop and Miss Marriott be the same?

"Where is she playing?" he said. "The Tivoli? There's time enough yet. Here, waiter, how much? Thanks, old chap, for the information. See you again."

And off he went post-haste to the theatre.

No, it was not Miss Marriott, nor very much like her, except that Kitty Dunlop had also red-gold hair. The story in the newspapers had evidently gone the rounds, for as soon as her turn came on he heard his neighbours whispering about it.

Hurrying back to his studio, he was promptly served with a writ, and also found an agitated note from the secretary of the New Gallery asking what was to be done.

What indeed? George was no Solomon.

He recalled a solicitor who frequented Chelsea, indeed lived just round the corner. Better ask his advice. What was the name? Ah yes, Eldersham.

Mr. Eldersham was luckily at home, luckily for himself as well as George. Clients did not often come his way. When he had heard the story, he exclaimed:

"My dear fellow, this is the finest advertisement you could possibly get. Damn it, you artists never know your luck. Leave this to me—don't you meddle in the matter. Let me have all the sketches you ever made of the girl, and you yourself go out into the country, out of the way, until I tell you to come back to town."

"But what will it all cost?"

"Oh you Scotchmen! If it cost you a thousand pounds it would be cheap. But rest you easy. It won't amount to more than your costs, if it amounts to that. She's doing this for advertisement herself—and she'll pay, or I'm a Dutchman."

Next morning as she brought in the breakfast, George's landlady handed him half a dozen cards.

"Gentlemen of the Press left them last night when you were out, sir. Something about a lady's picture, sir. Nothing very bad, I 'opes, sir. Laundry calls to-day, sir. Thank you, sir."

He must first go round to the New Gallery and explain. The secretary received him, half-angry and half-laughing.

"We had our record day yesterday," he said, "but why the devil did you do it? Every actress in London was

here, fighting to see the picture. And the Press, my dear sir! *And—the—Press!*—wanted to know who you were, why you were, how you were, where you were, when you were, what you were— By the way, who are you? and why the devil did we hang you so well? They all think we were in the know and did it to draw the crowd."

The telephone rang.

"Hullo!—Yes, New Gallery—What? That picture? Oh, we know nothing about it—No, absolutely nothing, nor about the artist—Scotch, I believe, young, clever? All our exhibitors here are clever—Sorry can't tell you any more, you'll find his address in our catalogue, price six-pence."

He cut off with a sigh.

"That's one redeeming feature. Gave a reprint order for the catalogue last night."

T-r-r-r-r-ing went the telephone again.

Another newspaper.

"Let me just assure you," said George, "it's all a mistake. The girl in the picture is not Miss Kitty Dunlop. I can prove it a dozen times over. I have other pictures of the real girl—one is in the Academy. The title was just a joke."

"That so?" said the secretary. "Well, it's a damned lucky joke. If I were you I'd make the most of it and lie low. Time enough to explain when the case comes on. Damn it all, we're coining money here on that picture. For God's sake keep it up! Vamoose! git!—and let them talk."

George laughed.

"That's what my solicitor said."

"Then take his advice. Send me your address in case of emergencies. Ta-ta! till we meet again."

As George went out, people were already pouring in through the turnstiles, and he could see a curious crowd round his picture. He hurried into the street and jumped into a hansom, directing the driver to Baker Street, and so to the farm in the Chilterns.

The farm-house lay a little off the road from Great Misenden to Little Kimble, in a hollow surrounded by trees. A thatched roof and walls covered with honeysuckle gave a cosy air, which the interior in no way contradicted. The door of his sitting-room opened on to a lawn where chickens and turkeys and one absurdly vain peacock scratched for a living and very soon claimed him as one of the family, hopping in and out of the door if ever he left it open. The approach to the farm-house was through an avenue of elms, leading back across the road to another which was so straight as to be evidently Roman. The walls of a Roman camp crowned one of the neighbouring hills and the Icknield Way just beyond pointed back to the days of the Iceni.

Not very far away the low rampart of Grim's Dyke ran across the country, and a spur of hill which legend connected with the name of Cymbeline commanded the neighbouring plain twenty miles or so towards Oxford. On certain dewy, clear-skied days, indeed, Magdalen Tower might be dimly distinguished against the horizon. Whiteleaf Cross was another link with the historic past, for here a great white cross had been cut in the days of Cavalier and Roundhead through the sward of the hill into the chalk beneath.

This was the country of Pym and Hampden, and on windy nights George could imagine the ghosts of these stiff-necked patriots riding down to Little Kimble to their protest against unrighteous impositions. A deep-grassed meadow shaded by one or two spreading oaks provided pasture for the farmer's cows, and beyond that ran a wood full of charming nooks for George to paint. The chair-makers of High Wycombe came as far as this and in their gipsy-like shelters added a human note to the landscape.

With so much to divert him, George found here a haven where he could await with equal mind the result of this strange lawsuit.

What exactly the solicitor did, and how the case was handled George never exactly fathomed. He knew that

all the sketches of Miss Marriott were taken from his studio, and he answered various pertinent questions sent him from time to time; but when he wrote suggesting consultations, Eldersham replied:

“Leave it all to me.”

Then a wire came that the case was due for a certain day next week. He was to appear at the Law Courts at eleven o'clock.

George was annoyed at being treated in this off-hand fashion. He went back to town and sought out Eldersham. The solicitor beamed upon him.

“So glad to see you now, old chap. Everything is fixed up. You would just have been in the way. It might have been still better—I could have run the case to two days, but perhaps it was better to come to a settlement. All costs will be paid by the other party. Nothing to be done now except play our little play in Court. Don't let a soul know you are in town. Mustn't give the show away. Must have the house full. This is the chance of your life. Everybody knows your name. Everybody has seen your picture. You are famous, my boy, and it's Kitty who pays the piper.”

“How on earth did you manage it.”

“My dear chap, she's an actress. This is a far better scheme than having her jewels stolen.”

George was so excited on the day of the trial that he had only a confused recollection afterwards of what happened. He remembered that the Court was packed to suffocation with smartly-dressed women, and some of his counsel's remarks made him wish that the ground would swallow him up. Perhaps the simplest way to record what happened is to reprint here the account that appeared in the *Evening Standard* of that date:—

ACTRESS v. ARTIST.
AMUSING SLANDER CASE.
SENSATIONAL SEQUEL.

In the King's Bench Division, before Mr. Justice Broom and a Special Jury, terms of settlement were announced in

the action by Miss Kitty Dunlop, a well-known variety actress, against Mr. George Grange, portrait-painter, for slander.

Mr. Dark, K.C., for the plaintiff stated that the jury would not be troubled with the case. The defendant, he said, had painted a picture which was exhibited at the New Gallery and which was entitled in the catalogue "Portrait of a Wicked Woman." That portrait bore a striking resemblance to Miss Kitty Dunlop, and the title was calculated to do serious damage to the character and professional reputation of an innocent lady. His client, however, had satisfied herself by subsequent inquiry and reflection that this was a case of mistaken identity, and that the portrait in question was meant to represent some one other than herself. It was true that it represented a lady with red-gold hair—

His Lordship: Is the plaintiff's hair red-gold?

Mr. Dark: Nearly always (laughter in Court). But the shade of hair was not the sole cause of confusion. The silk shawl shown in the picture was of the same shade of green as a shawl (produced in Court) worn by the plaintiff, and the general similarity of features was such that the attention of Miss Dunlop was drawn to the resemblance in a letter addressed to her by a well-known peer.

His Lordship: What else did he say in the letter?

Mr. Dark: He invited her to supper at the Savoy. (Loud laughter.) To continue, Miss Dunlop has been convinced by the inspection of twenty-seven other portraits of the other lady by the same artist that she herself is not the wicked woman portrayed. She only desired to clear her character in public and has agreed to allow judgment for the defendant with costs of this action including costs as between solicitor and client.

Mr. Blaithwaite, K.C., representing the Directors of the New Gallery, stated that his clients were involved in this settlement through having published the alleged slander in their catalogue. They were about to issue the fifth reprint of this catalogue, and in order to prevent the possibility of further confusion were prepared to add a footnote to the title of the portrait in question, "*This is not Miss Kitty Dunlop.*"

Mr. Oldbury, K.C., for the defendant desired to state

that in painting this portrait Mr. Grange had not the slightest intention to reflect in any way upon the character of the plaintiff. Indeed this portrait represented an entirely different lady, and the title was chosen with humorous intention and with the consent of the original sitter, who was a professional model. As he had not the pleasure of the plaintiff's acquaintance, Mr. Grange was not in a position to know whether she was a wicked woman or not, but he certainly thought her a very good actress and presumed that like most of her sex she was an angel. He was prepared to offer amends for the annoyance unwittingly caused to the plaintiff by painting her portrait without charge, although he feared he could not do justice to her charms.

His Lordship: Is this leading up to a proposal of marriage?

Mr. Oldbury: It would be too late. According to my information the plaintiff was united this morning before a registrar in the bonds of holy matrimony to the peer already referred to. (Sensation in Court.)

His Lordship: I trust the plaintiff will rest satisfied with this new title. Permit me to congratulate her ladyship.

One afternoon a few days after the conclusion of the case, as George was cursing a model who had not turned up, there shuffled in, three inches at a time, an old, old man with pale and sodden face. The cheeks were pendulous like dewlaps and the eyes all shot with blood. Had the Last Trump been sounded the grave could not have rendered up more terrible tribute.

The stranger jerked a card at George; then shuddered in a chair. The name covered a reputation of enormous wealth. Who had not heard of Sir Joshua Felshead?

"Do you know Greek?" said a voice full of mists and whisperings and pain.

George quoted the only line he could recollect:

"Tond' apomeibomenos prosephe polumetis Odusseus"
(To him in answer spake the cunning Odysseus).

Merriment flickered in green shafts under those swollen eyelids.

"Good, good! You'll understand. Behold in me Prometheus, chained to three millions, with cancer gnawing at his vitals. Behold, too, Tantalus at whose lips the fruit must ever hang untasted."

He was surely mad. A wealthy lunatic, for a diamond pinned his tie.

"You are to paint my portrait—quick—before I die."

George rose to the humour of the eccentric and seized his palette.

"Keep still," he said, clamping an untouched canvas to his easel.

"Ho, ho!" chuckled the old man, more than ever un-earthly. "Not so fast. What's your price?"

"Forty guineas."

"Pounds."

"Done."

"Go on."

It was thrilling. George roughed in the drawing in masses of greens and reds, catching the character through sheer violence of colour. It was reckless, devilish; but, when in an hour the old man panted for rest, the artist felt that the sketch, crude as it was, towered above anything he had yet done. He was almost afraid to show it. Yet Sir Joshua was pleased.

"That's it," he groaned. "Put your knives and daggers into me. I want the truth."

Another hour of breakneck work and then George paused.

"The light is changing," he said. "If you want the truth, you must live till to-morrow."

"Is that all?"

"Three days more, if you can."

"I'll pay you by instalments."

"No, cash."

"Good, call my servant."

George strode to the door. Out there in the street stood a carriage, two chestnuts pawing the ground. A servant

in livery sprang up the steps and hurried to Sir Joshua, who sank back into his cushions. The strain of sitting two hours on a hard seat had been frightful. Then, shaking a chalky forefinger, he swept out of sight.

George went back as if in a dream. He could not believe that it was true. And yet there before him on the easel stood the proof. What a face!

The address on the card was Park Lane. George went out for a cup of tea, and then, a little recovered, stepped along to see what sort of a house Sir Joshua lived in.

The street in front was strewn with straw, and the policeman promptly collared a news-boy who commenced to shout his contents. Very soon he spied George too, and walked suspiciously past.

"Any business?" he said over his shoulder.

"Is that where the millionaire lives?" asked George, pointing to the house.

"W'ich millionaire?"

"Sir Joshua Felshead."

"May you be connected with the Press?"

"No, I am an artist and I am painting Sir Joshua's portrait. I wish to know if that is his house."

"Very like," said Robert, heaving a sigh, "but more like his coffin-shell."

"Dying? I thought so."

"Thought so? W'y not so?" said the philosopher in blue.

"Wot is death but a change of beat?"

Surprised at such an answer.

"Are you——" George began.

"I'm relieved. Six o'clock!" snapped Robert, and swung round to a comrade who had just turned the corner.

The old man came to the studio at the same time next day and for the two days following. Exhausted as he was at the end of each sitting, he seemed to have nerves of iron and kept Death scowling.

On the last day George told him of the sentimental policeman, but the old man made no comment. All the same he must have understood, for at the interval he said:

"If you have seen the outside of my house, better come inside as well. You lunch with me to-morrow. It will cost you nothing."

As he made the final inspection of the portrait, he nodded in a satisfied way and told the servant to take it off, wet as it was, then placed four ten pound notes on the table.

So ended George's first commission, though more was yet to come of it.

Next day he arrived punctually at Sir Joshua's house and was shown up a staircase magnificently carpeted.

At the foot of the balustrade were two Greek marbles. Facing him was a Veronese, and at the turn of the stairs he saw two Titians.

Sir Joshua, more like wet clay than ever, uneasily reclined beside a table which was already laid. Round him hung servants, constantly changing his pillows and anticipating his slightest pain. Sir Joshua pointed to a seat, suffering too much to speak.

Two footmen served food, but this was not an atmosphere for appetite. Still George did his best, afraid to offend.

The table service was of delicate design, mostly in hammered silver, but George had half expected to find it all of ebony, with soup served round in a skull. Sir Joshua, as he sipped his water, eyed the dishes.

"Tantalus!" at last he whispered.

It was his only word. Some paroxysm seized him and the servants wheeled him out of the room.

"Sir Joshua is always taken like that at this time of day," said the butler.

"How dreadful!"

"A little port, sir?"

"No thanks."

"'47, sir?"

"I can't stand this any longer. I must have fresh air. Will you pay my respects to Sir Joshua and say I am sorry I must go?"

He almost ran into the street.

The old man was a vampire that no work could shake

off. He infested George's dreams, waking him in cold sweats. At the opening of the next exhibition of the Society of Portraitists, George read in his morning paper that the portrait he had painted was hung in the centre room and had attracted much attention. Sir Joshua must have sent it on his own account.

He hurried off to Park Lane, to find that the blinds were down.

"Sir Joshua died this morning," said the footman.

The butler, who had seen George from a window, hurried down to stop him.

"You are the young artist, sir, are you not?"

"I painted Sir Joshua's portrait last June."

"That's it. Would you come in, sir? I should like to ask a favour of you."

George was led into a room, the walls of which were hung with Raeburns. The butler, heavy-browed and quiet-eyed, stood by the table mechanically rapping his knuckles on the cloth.

"Having served Sir Joshua for forty year, I would make so bold as to ask if you would make a sketch drawing of him as he lays."

"Certainly."

"Will you come this way, sir?"

Again they went upstairs.

The body of the millionaire lay on a little stretcher bed that might have cost a pound. The floor was bare board and the only other thing in the room was a daguerreotype of an old woman, hanging on the wall.

"This was his bedroom as he liked to have it. He was afraid of the night, lest he should be taken in the midst of wealth, as he said. That was his mother."

Death had taken twenty years of pain out of the old man's face. It was a hard face still, but very human.

"Ay, ay," said the butler. "Ay, ay. This was his great relief."

"How long did you say you served him?" asked George as he shaped the portrait.

"Forty year, sir. Forty year."

"And how long had he been ill?"

"You see him as he was in '72."

When the sketch was finished, George handed it to the butler.

"Ay, ay," he said. "Ay, ay."

"Sir Joshua was a good friend to me," said George. "Now I must be going."

"Sir, I am indebted to you."

"No," said George. "I think that you too were his friend."

Coming as it did so soon after the sensational case of Kitty Dunlop, this portrait could not fail to be talked about. A deluge of commissions followed. The eccentric millionaire was famed for unearthing artists, and many found it wise to peg out claims alongside. The portrait was a *tour de force*, and yet George showed himself quite equal to the demand occasioned by these two so lucky advertisements.

The Art Critic of the *Cynic* was once more on his heels.

"Really," George read, "we demand protection. The picture of the exhibition is certainly the portrait of Sir Joshua Felshead. It smashes every other picture in the room. But surely the public has a right to protection. The picture of the year at the Academy has sometimes been marked off by a rail. In the case of this portrait we should suggest a cage. It bites."

Though George made enemies of his unflattered sitters, Burlington House was kind, and it was not long before his name was fairly well known. At the Portraitists he was always excellently hung. Although photography was already luring the lazy middle-class away from paint, he was a rapid worker, and could hold his own where the laborious starved. His gentlemanly dress and tidy studio were in his favour. The type of person who commissions a portrait does not dote on chairs that have been casually smeared with yellow ochre. So too his application to the

work on hand pleased chaperons, who saw that this excellent young man had no mind for flirting.

With fortune grew ambition. It was ambition that made him refuse to pander to the pretty-pretty. Truth at this time came into fashion, and George was hailed in print by the up-to-date. The critics certainly read more into his method than he ever meant. They compared him to Velazquez—who left him cold—and hinted at Carolus Duran—none of whose paintings he had ever seen. If they had talked of Raeburn, they would have been nearer truth. But this giant Scot had not yet been exploited by the dealers, and a critic has to adjust his standard of Old Masters by the sales at Christie's. The praise, however, proved so beneficial that George felt compelled by policy to evade, lest he should undeceive, his literary benefactors.

The more he painted, the more he sympathised with those who at times do portraits below their reputation. Some of his sitters made his head ache. How was it possible to depict repose in a butterfly who was on the wing from noon till night, who pouted all the time because she was so tired?

Such success at such an early age was indeed enough to upset his balance. And yet he was sobered by the remembrance of still greater fortune. Had not Lawrence stormed Society as a mere lad, and been forced on the Academy at twenty-one?

At times he met his comrades of St. Margaret's; some still students, others fumbling for their feet. A piece of wedding cake arrived one day from Manchester "from Mr. and Mrs. Shanks," so evidently all was well now in that quarter. Occasionally he heard from Ravin's wife. But the letters were almost formal. What annoyed him more, they were ill-spelt. Reid was hopeless as a correspondent. George wrote to him time and again, only to receive an occasional post card in answer. To Mrs. Middleton he was ashamed to write, remembering his refusal of her so kind invitation. Yet she had not forgotten him, and after a long silence sent him a letter which brought back warm

memories of the days when they had met and talked with one another in Stonehaven.

"DEAR GEORGE," it ran,

"You must have thought I had forgotten you, but Nathaniel Reid has been here and, if you could have heard us talking about you, you would understand that you are very real to us. As usual I am overwhelmed with social obligations—hardly a minute to myself with the work of this large house and luncheons and committee meetings and calls and heavy Glasgow dinners. We are the victims of our own hospitality in this rich, pretentious city and make ourselves ill with mutual entertainments.

"I might indeed have been too preoccupied to properly remember you, but this is a city which thinks itself an art centre. Our wealthy merchants and brokers decorate their mock feudal castles in Kelvinside with green and purple decorations which shout their Artiness at us. We are supposed to be the pinnacle of taste, breathing Lavery and Guthrie and Mackintosh, and cannot have our photographs taken without talking of tones and values. Yet I am glad, because each thought of art brings back to me the memory of my young friend, alas, so far away in London.

"Well, as I was saying, Nathaniel Reid has been hanging pictures at an Exhibition in which your portrait of some society beauty—the Honourable Julia Faversham—has a place of honour. It was in the Academy, I understand, but is none the worse for wear. Nathaniel dragged me to it from the turnstiles, and stood before it chuckling till I thought he would explode.

"'Gosh,' he said, 'Gosh! I didna think the lad had it in him. You can see yon purple powder she put on her haughty cheeks, and the sniff she sniffed at him through her William the Conqueror nose the while he was paintin' her. Gosh! but he got even with her. She goes down to posterity as a vain, supercilious numskull.'

"You certainly did not flatter the lady, but she looks so real that it must be a true portrait. I suppose the Honourable Julia thinks so too, otherwise she would not let it be exhibited.

"'O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us.'

"I can't refrain from quoting some more of Nathaniel's sayings: 'Geordie has cut loose from his apron-strings. He stands on his ain feet now. There's no fudgin' about in yon picture. He just goes bang at it. Look at the big brushes he uses! Gosh, and the palette knife's spreadin' the paint about just like butter. He's as cocksure of himself as Methuselah was about his next birthday. Who would have thought yon feckless loonie could learn so quick?'

"I tell you this to show you that your old master is satisfied. Nathaniel can't quite fathom the change in your character. He says you used to lack self-reliance, whereas now you are decisive and independent. I am not so surprised because I have seen the same thing happen with flowers. You take a plant that is sickly and backward, however much you may water it and feed it with fertiliser, then in despair you transplant it to another soil, less rich perhaps but sunnier, and leave it to look after itself. You come back in a month to find a strong vigorous growth with blossoms blowing and clean healthy leaves. The deeper it has been planted, the stronger the growth. So it often is with human souls. You were becoming a bookworm and recluse when Nathaniel took you into the open air. You grew up into a new man in the soil of art. He planted you deep when he forced you to go through all the drudgery, but that gave you a rooting and foundation which now give you confidence. Don't you think the parallel is justified? Just take care that the weeds which grow so easily in your new garden don't grow apace at your expense.

"Nathaniel thinks you are on a fair way to be a woman hater. 'In the calf-love stage,' he said, 'the lass tells the lad that all women are angels, knowin' that she comes in with the crowd. She encourages him in sentimental foolishness, puttin' rose spectacles over his eyes so that he omits to note that most angels are cats. If Geordie hadna passed that stage, he would have made the Honourable Julia look like the cover for a sweetie box, instead of the hereditary footler that she is.'

"I fear we are too provincial for you here. We have not many titled folk in Glasgow, but there are rich ambitious wives and daughters who can be persuaded to sit to a

fashionable portrait painter. So I still have a faint flicker of hope that I shall see you again.

"Did you know that I am a grandmother now? Katie has a dear little boy—of course the loveliest boy there ever was.

"Ever your affectionate friend,

"AGNES MIDDLETON."

This was the last letter he ever received from her. A few weeks later George received a memorial notice saying that Mrs. Middleton had died suddenly, deeply regretted by her loving family.

George now found himself pursued by flatterers, idlers who called him "old fellow" and pestered him with ill-timed calls. Ambition made him rude. He grudged the minutes that might be spent in strengthening his right to fame.

Ambition made him more complacent to the calls of patrons. He frequented a useful house at five o'clock, although he knew his hostess thought it part of the performance to hand her baby round like an article of refreshment. The baby was the one section of the human race that he felt should be idealised in art.

Although with all his dandyism he would rather have worn a flowerpot than a silk hat on his head, he armed himself at times with fortune's helmet. For as his skill advanced, especially in catching the character of men, so grew ambition. He would be another Dürer or another Holbein, picturing the great men of his age, who shaped the policy, the thought, the happiness, the faith of their country. To reach that end he must relax no nerve. Had not Dürer intrigued to gain the ear of Maximilian, partly for his debt, but mostly for a place in history?

It was while lunching with a patron at the Junior Carlton that this desire matured. At the next table sat the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister—both silent, for the Premier was absorbed in thought, tracking perhaps some intricate entanglement of foreign policy.

One lady offered to secure him sitters if he would paint

her portrait free. George had wit to change the issue.

"I will paint your portrait," he replied, "not for what you offer, but because your face is beautiful."

She was woman of the world enough to disbelieve him, but she was enough woman of the world to repeat his version. The portrait won the Line at next Academy.

So it was that he joined a sporting club, nominally to please a patron, really for bigger game—the human lion. Yet such sport was stolen from hours of sleep, and he would rise after a heavy night to catch the earliest sun, and picture some blinking model.

Who that had known his dreamy days at King's could have prophesied this chase for fame?

To justify his connexion with such a club, George shared a fishing lease in Hampshire with the member who had put him up—Colonel Wodehouse, whose portrait with rod and basket made such a hit at the New Gallery. Colonel Wodehouse was a devoted angler and introduced George to the persuasive charms of Jock Scott and Silver Doctor. After a day or two with the colonel in the fine art of enticing trout from a clear stream George began to grow more human.

He learned the thrill of watching the ripple of flies lightly cast and drawn across the water, the rise, the strike, the throb and the dash for cover of the furious victim, the line rushing out of the reel with a sound like the tearing of silk, and then the playing with its triumphant finish or the hard luck of a lost fish. He learned to know the pools where at twilight the big fellows might be found—the deep pools with their cooling springs, the mouths of the tributary brooks, the deadwater just above the rapids, the eddy at the big rocks. From its grassy bank the iris bent over the deep reflection of its purple flowers. Here George learned a hundred lessons of light and shade, a hundred lessons of patience and diplomacy.

The Chelsea Arts Club was the one place in London which he really found congenial. Although its members mostly represented the revolt against the Academy, they

were at least sincere. He shied at close acquaintanceship, partly through lack of time and partly for fear of cliques. At the same time he liked to listen to the discussions that might be heard there.

It amused him, too, to compare the work and persons of these other artists. There seemed no rule except in the case of the obscene. The slipshod was so often dirty-minded. On the other hand, where work was good and true, the brains were settled in such curious bodies. A dashing, open-air landscapist was like an old woman, afraid to venture out without umbrella. A pioneer in portraiture trembled at his own voice. The men of most established fame seemed to be the most modest. One in particular took his fancy, great in stature and in work, but so quiet and so human, that one could not but respect him. George had several chances of visting his studio, never taken. He did not wish to inflict himself, any more than he could suffer the jack-in-the-boxes who pestered him himself.

His landscapes never sold, but they were an excuse for health, and took him every week-end when he was not fishing, and every summer to his quiet farm-house in the Chilterns.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO UNEXPECTED INTERVIEWS

FIVE years had passed since Ravin left for America. George had now a studio in Tite Street, with a man to look after it and him, a boy in buttons at the door, and a *chef* to cater to his somewhat fastidious tastes. In the ante-room a dreamy haired young Frenchman played airs on the piano. This was a hint that he took from the history of Monna Lisa, and on many of his sitters it certainly had excellent effect. It helped the painter too, for although he was so intent when at work that he hardly heard the music, his nerves were attuned, and he became more sympathetic.

Some of his brother artists were inclined to criticise him for this luxury. They said he did it for advertisement, so that he should be known as the Artist Who Paints to Music. But he really was no charlatan, and let them cavil.

He was on his feet now. He knew it, and confirmation came from an unexpected quarter.

"I want to call on you one day," said an old general whom he met at the house of the hostess with the baby. "It is about a portrait, but not my own. When would be convenient?"

"Say to-morrow afternoon."

"To-morrow it shall be."

"To-morrow" was an irritating day for George—bad light and an impatient sitter. He almost wished he had not asked the old man to come. He wanted to be alone. But after all it might mean business—that wonderful consoler. Prompt to the minute—four o'clock had been named—the bell announced the general.

A cup of tea, a cigar, and then to the matter in hand.

"The fact is," said his visitor, "I am on the committee of a club—you will have noticed the name on my card—and we have been looking for an artist to paint for us a picture of His Majesty the King. Now you——"

"Pardon me," interrupted George. "I may as well save time by explaining that it is out of the question. On principle I never paint from photographs."

The general smiled.

"Who said photographs? If you will glance again at my card you will see that the club in question is—well, somewhat exclusive. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that we might obtain for you some special sittings from His Majesty."

George flushed.

"I beg your pardon. But surely—I am really not sufficiently well known. The King would only sit to an Academician, or to some artist of international reputation. Of course there are a few colonial artists who are specially favoured, but—but——"

"But let me say my say. Frankly, I never heard of you myself until a week ago. I am a soldier, not a connoisseur, but you were recommended so emphatically by a man who ought to know, that I and my committee felt it our duty to approach you. It was at my desire that our hostess yesterday arranged our meeting. I am an old soldier, don't you know, and like to reconnoitre."

It was nicely worded.

"You will forgive me if I speak quite openly and say that you were not the first whom we approached. Money is no object in this affair, and we approached an artist—an Academician—of international reputation, declared indeed by many critics to be the foremost portrait painter of the day. We offered him his own terms, but to our embarrassment his terms were quite impracticable—he himself admitted it. Well, he knows best. He actually declined to take the commission unless he could command the presence of His Majesty for a whole day at a time, and

for an indefinite number of days—it might be two or it might be twenty—just as often as he found it necessary to complete a picture to his own artistic satisfaction. My dear sir, in the case of one so busy as the King, in this his Coronation year, the stipulations were absurd—out of the question.

“To tell the truth, he informed us that we were not the first to approach him with a similar request. ‘Well then,’ I said, ‘since you cannot undertake this work yourself, whom would you recommend? Is there any rising young artist whose work is likely to be of permanent value and a credit to our club?’ ‘Rising artist?’ he said. ‘That is another matter. Will you take a sporting chance? There is one rising artist—not a popular artist, at least as yet, but quite remarkably able, who would be glad of such a chance. If I myself had this commission to offer he would be my choice.’ Without further palaver, let me say that yours was the name he gave us.”

Although no names were mentioned, George at once knew who alone could be his benefactor. He could hardly believe his good fortune. What a compliment!

“I hardly know what to say,” he ventured at last.

“Don’t you think you could tackle it?”

“That’s not what bothers me. Of course I could. Damn it, the King is just like any other man. Give me three sittings of an hour apiece and I’ll do it. But what I am thinking of is this, that I should have been recommended by him of all men. I know the man you mean. It is extraordinarily kind of him. What a splendid fellow he is—the artist, I mean.”

George rose from his chair and paced the studio.

“Well,” said the general, chuckling at the effect of his bombshell. “What’s the verdict now?”

“I don’t know what to say. I tell you I don’t feel sure that you aren’t making a fool of me. Besides, it’s all very well for—for—the artist in question to hand on this commission to me, but what about the King himself, and the Lord High Chamberlain, and the Lord High Everything

Else, what will they say when they are told that this portrait is to be painted by any one who is not at least an A.R.A.?"

"That's our affair, not yours," said the general. "And to be frank, we have already sounded the Lord High Everything Else, who told us to go to the devil. But I am an old soldier, sir, and something of a tactician, if I may say so in all due modesty, so I went not to the devil but to one whom I know to be many a man's good angel, namely, Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen. Let me tell you that she has taken an interest in this budding genius, and has assured me that if the Lord High Everything Else won't let the King be painted by you, she will sit to you herself. Now what do you say to that?"

George gasped.

"I think I'll have a drink," he said, and touched a button.

"Glasses for two."

As the man brought in the whiskey George pulled himself together.

"This is my favourite blend," he said, "thirty-five different brews—wonderfully mellow."

"Perhaps my hand is steadier," said the general, taking the decanter. "Say when."

"Stop! Stop!"

"The Queen! God bless her! Where did you say you get it from? Just let me take a note of the address—we must have it for our cellar at the club. Thanks. No, not another just yet—well, only a little one."

They looked at each other and laughed.

"Gad!" said the general, "I wish I was young again like you—all my battles to fight over again—eh, what?"

"There will be blood spilt over this," said George, "bad blood, I fear. The artist is a jealous brute. However, I'm not afraid. And if your committee will give me the chance, I'll put my best work into this portrait."

"My dear fellow, I know you will. We've been round the shows looking at your work, and we came to the con-

clusion that you were the man for us. The portrait of Admiral Benbow—Gad! it's a masterpiece. But of course you will understand there are some preliminaries to go through: you may have to be presented at Court, we must mollify the Lord High, etc. Perhaps you would condescend to paint a pretty portrait of his daughter, and we shall have to wait till these Coronation festivities are over—probably must wait till autumn. But you are young yet. What do a few months matter to you?"

What indeed! Such a commission would be the making of him. No more chasing for commissions. He could pick and choose among celebrities.

"You'll come and dine with me at the Club and meet a few of the members. What do you say to Tuesday of next week? Very well, that's fixed—seven-thirty. Such a charming studio you have here. Not a married man? We'll go to the Empire afterwards."

The general rose and walked round examining the pictures on the wall.

"By the way," he said casually, "we haven't said anything about terms."

"I usually get a hundred," said George.

"Better make it two-fifty. We shall be more likely then to realise the value of the portrait. Ahem! some fascinating studies here. Where the deuce do you get these unsophisticated ladies from?—Garden of Eden, I presume."

He stopped in front of one, examining it attentively.

"Very, very charming. What a curious resemblance! Do you know, I could swear this was a portrait, a very unsophisticated portrait, of a lady I know."

"That?" said George. "That was a sketch I made, let's see, five or six years ago. A professional model—I don't think you would be likely to have met her."

"Well, my dear chap, let me give you my advice: don't you exhibit that sketch without first consulting your solicitors. You will have an action from the lady for defamation of character, or I'm a juggins. By the way, that reminds me, are you the artist? Yes, you are—you

and Kitty Dunlop. Well, I needn't warn you—you've been there before. But as for this picture here, why, there are a dozen people I know who would swear that this was Mrs. Wolseley Greville."

He was too intent on the picture to notice George's sudden confusion.

"Ever hear of the lady? Wife of the man who runs the Minerva Theatre, a most superlative bounder; but she herself is quite an attractive person—French extraction, I understand."

"I go so seldom to the play," George answered, recovering himself. "I always avoid the theatrical set."

"Don't blame you. Well, well, a most remarkable coincidence! I shall tell her next time I see her. And now, my dear fellow, I must be off. It's understood then, if we can fix up the sittings, you shall be the artist. That is to say, if I have my way. But in the meanwhile say nothing—time enough to talk when the portrait is finished and approved. And of that, for my part, I have no doubt. Good-bye."

After the old man had gone George sank into a seat by the window, lost in thought.

So then Ethel had returned to London. She was in some sort of Society. He might meet her any day.

And he was to paint the portrait of the King!

Fame evidently had her eye on George. Hardly had he got over the surprise of the general's proposal when a note came from the art critic who had been the honoured guest at Clotter's unforgettable Show Sunday.

"DEAR MR. GRANGE,

"Talking the other day to my friend, the Editor of the *Studio*, I suggested a series of articles on the younger portrait painters, to which he agreed. Your name occurred and met with his approval. I write to ask whether I may have the privilege of a few intimate moments—interview is too banal a word—so that I may be able to give a more vital note to my impressions of your work.

"Yours very sincerely,

"ARCHIBALD ROE."

"Better make it lunch," George wrote in reply, naming a day.

The art critic arrived in an absent-minded way half an hour too soon. He had apparently forgotten the previous meeting, or was too absorbed in himself to make the effort of recognition. George was to be merely an incident in his forthcoming article.

"My theory of portraiture is that it should express the soul of the age. It may be the age of romance, or the age of costume, the age of intrigue or the age of affectation. The portrait painters who have lived have all portrayed their age, not merely their sitters. Now Velazquez——"

But Velazquez was a red rag to George. He groaned to think that five years had passed and yet this critic fellow was still the same. Fortunately the door opened with "Lunch is served."

The menu had been well thought out, for George remembered that this interviewer had the air of being carefully fed. Mr. Roe was distinctly present-bodied; and, as one dainty dish followed another, he realised that the wines were good. Coming down to earth, he discussed the merits of Jules and the Café Royal, of this bouquet and of that. It was not till they came back to the studio that he suddenly remembered he had a mission.

"You will excuse my mentioning it," he said, over a particularly choice cigar, "but for an artist you do yourself remarkably well. We shall be good friends, I see. You are a man of my own tastes. So many artists, even portrait painters, are so primitive. How can they understand the world in which their patrons move unless they too are men of the world. This age is the age of materialism, mental and physical. We desire an accurate picture without undue imagination of the men and women and landscape and surroundings that we know. We demand a scientific technique from our artists, and that portrait painters should live as gentlemen. The days of Bohemia are past. Art is now a profession, particularly the art of portrait painting, and the professional man must be civilised if he wishes to

retain his practice, his clientèle. The court painter has given place to the painter of society. Now Velazquez——”

“Crème de menthe, kümmel, or old brandy?”

“Thanks. Ah, your cellar is worthy of your *chef*. But what was I saying? Yes, Art—the soul of its age—now Velazquez portrayed the age of courtliness, not merely the *portrait d'apparat*, but the age of cultured chivalry: quiet dames, men of breeding. He lived in courts and in the king's air—he was court painter *par excellence* in a courtly age. And then his technique—marvellous, marvellous!”

He wandered on, Velazquez this and Velazquez that. Irritated to rudeness, George interrupted.

“Would you like to look at some of my studies? Which of my portraits have you seen?”

“All in good time, but I want you to understand my point of view. When I pass through an exhibition of modern portraits I always test them by this measure, do they or do they not portray the soul of the age? It is not sufficient that they are dexterous presentments, well designed, good likenesses. Do they mirror this age? Now Velazquez——”

“Mr. Roe,” said George abruptly, “if you mention Velazquez again, I shall scream. Are you going to write this article about him or about me? Leave the other man out. He's a dead and goner.”

Archibald Roe was imperturbable.

“Dead, alas, yes; and a ‘goner’—horrible phrase. You are still young, I perceive; from Scotland, I presume—another of those young men from the North. No, my dear sir, not altogether gone. The perfect painter cannot die. I know your point of view—you are a modern and are jealous of the competition of the Old Masters. We who are critics and students, professors, not practitioners of Art, are free from such personal bias. We are the true amateurs. Yet I realise your position——”

“Well, I don't,” said George. “I thought I was here to be interviewed, but it seems that your editor has sent you to give me a free lecture on Art.”

Archibald Roe glanced curiously at his host.

"You are very practical, but not quite up-to-date. The kind of interview you seem to look for is much more dead than Velazquez. If you read some of my little monographs you will see how we do it nowadays."

"I never read books on Art."

"Arrogance of youth! How much it misses! How much it has to learn! How can you thread the currents of art unless you take the direction of the pilot? How can you understand the soul?"

"Damn the soul!" said George. "I don't paint souls. I paint pictures."

Roe shook his head.

"This is, as I said before, a materialistic age, and you paint the age, or else you fail."

"The soul of a soulless age."

"Quite so—quite so—excellent. Ha! ha! I must make a note of that, illustrated, shall we say, by your portrait of Sir Joshua Felshead."

"You remember that?" George was somewhat mollified.

"It shocked me inexpressibly. But by the way, talking of illustrations, let me have a look at some of your masterpieces."

George touched the bell, and his man carried out for their inspection a procession of canvases.

"Enough!" he said at last. "Those which I have selected will do."

He looked round the wall till his eye rested on the sketch of Ethel.

"Let's have this as well," he said. "Just what he would like, my editor I mean."

George hesitated. Should he risk it? Would Ethel ever see it if he did? Perhaps it might annoy her—even get her into trouble.

"I—I had rather not say yes till I have asked the model's permission. That is a sketch which—well, does not belong entirely to me."

"Never mind. After all, we are dealing with portraits mostly. By the way, have you had any distinguished sitters, Royalties? To be sure, you are young yet."

Again that curious look at George.

"I suppose," he cleared his throat as he said it, "if I were to introduce a good client, you would allow a commission?"

The turn was so unexpected that George asked his visitor to repeat the remark. Yet he was so used to the suggestion from all sorts of people that there was nothing very strange about it. He considered for a moment.

"Why, yes, I suppose so. It would depend——"

"Depend on what?"

"Whether the artist had the soul of the age."

Roe laughed.

"He comes from Scotland. He lives as a man of the world, not as an ordinary old-fashioned artist. He is the very clever hero of a certain famous libel case—the staging of that play was quite superb. He is most anxious to bring his interviewer to the point—very practical—eh, what? Surely we understand each other, Mr. Grange."

"I'm not quite certain yet," said George. "I'll wait till I see what you say about me in your article. After that perhaps we can talk business."

"Right, right, my canny friend. If you can persuade yourself to read that one little monograph on Art, you will understand the modern interview. And you will find that you have not spread your table in vain."

With that parting shot, Archibald Roe made his adieux.

CHAPTER XXIV

ETHEL AGAIN

NEXT day was Sunday. As he passed along the Fulham Road he noticed a placard on what seemed to be the porch of a church. It read:

OCTAVE OF THE SEVEN DOLOURS
HIGH MASS
SUNG BY FATHER PHILIP
WILL BE CELEBRATED AT
ELEVEN O'CLOCK

The title caught his fancy. It was already past the hour. He had never been in a Roman Catholic Church before.

At the end of a corridor he turned through swing doors on the right into a Gothic interior, heavy with incense. A tenor was singing. The church was full, but a verger found him a seat at the back, grumbling that no fee was offered.

The service appealed to George. With half-shut eyes he watched the flame of slender candles mellow against the vestments of the priests.

Then came a sermon from a text in Jeremiah: "Great as the sea, Mother of Sorrows, is thy sorrow."

The preacher told them of the seven sorrows of the mother of Jesus, and how bitter was her grief on the Hill of Calvary. Never did mother lose such a son!

A melancholy voice.

Behind the preacher hung a figure of the Christ nailed to the Cross, and with sudden gesture he pointed to this,

picturing that last terrible scene. The listeners swayed with him as he turned, as if under the spell of vision.

Fascinated, George forgot surroundings. The heart that so long had slept was once more stirred. He realised that he was alone in the world, alone in selfish absorption. Could he find new life in a religion such as this, in the contemplation of the Cross and of that great sacrifice?

He was roused by a sob. A few seats in front of him sat a lady, beautifully dressed. So far George had not seen her face, but then she turned it for a moment and he saw that it was Ethel—the model—Wolseley Greville's wife.

What was she doing here? Ah, yes, she had become a Catholic. She said that in her letter. Perhaps she had become devout. Should he speak to her at the end of the service?

Just then she rose to pass out. Instinct made him rise too. She saw him, but went on and, after bowing to the altar, hurried to the door.

George thought she was avoiding him, but when he too went out he found her at the entrance. She offered him her hand.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" she said half shyly. "I want to thank you for letting me down so easily that time. I took your lesson to heart. Did you ever get my letter—one I wrote from Paris? I half expected an answer. But perhaps I was better forgotten."

"I am sorry I was so remiss," said George. "I always meant to write. Anyhow we have met again." Then, after a pause, "You returned to your husband?"

"I did better. I reformed him. He is working hard and getting on awfully well. Haven't you noticed his name in the papers? He is a theatrical manager, quite important already, though he has been at it only a few years. With capital you can do so much. We are quite reconciled, and he is a new man. You must come and see us."

George bowed, not knowing what to say. He remembered the scene on the cliff at Dunnottar, the story of the

unfortunate barmaid, the attempt at murder, the pitiful fate of Molly Arnold, and wondered what sort of repentance this could be.

"How's Art?" she went on gaily. "Oh dear, what times those were! It all seems a bad dream now. To think that once I was an artist's model!"

Just then the people streamed out from the church.

"Walk along with me a little," she said. "We live in South Kensington."

George saw more difference in her now that he had talked to her. Good living evidently suited her. She had lost her old sharp look. Her voice was quieter.

"Do you often come to this church?" he asked.

"This particular church seems to appeal to me. It is maintained by the Order of the Servites—perhaps you have read about them? They devote themselves to the one aspect of our Lady as the Lady of the Seven Sorrows or Dolours—a beautiful idea, is it not? They are the sorrows of a mother, and you know my history—I told you—the baby that we had and lost."

"Yes, yes," said George. "You told me in your letter you were trying to recover it. So you did not succeed?"

"No, no. I have crossed over to Paris dozens of times, but it is useless. I fear she is lost for ever. You understand me. And now that I have the money and the home for her it is no use."

"I am indeed sorry."

"You will come to see us, won't you now?"

"Yes; but later on."

"Thanks," she said. "Let me give you this little book. It is the Servite manual and tells you all about our Lady's sorrows. When you read the Sixth Dolour you will remember me. Don't think it blasphemy," she added quickly. "I know I haven't a fine mind, and perhaps you may think me wicked to compare my sorrow with hers. But I can't help the way in which I have been made. And remember," she said, holding out her hand to say good-bye, "I owe you a debt I never can repay."

"Good-bye," said George, and there was that old lump again in his throat as he watched her slip round the corner.

When he got home he turned to the manual and read the supplication to which she had referred.

"I compassionate thee, O most Holy Mother, with all the tenderness of my heart in the extreme desolation. He who was all thy delight, the centre of thy affections, thy Son and thy God, lies in the darkness of the tomb, and thou art under the sway of a sorrow immense as the sea. O dear Mother of Dolours, I would that I could console thee in thy grief. With the grace of Jesus and thine own aid, I promise that I will no more renew thy sorrows with my sins, but will serve my God faithfully on earth, that I may come to share with thee the joys of Paradise. Amen."

"I wonder," he said, half aloud, as he read it over, "is she sincere?"

His fingers turned the pages idly, till by chance he came to the tabulated lists of plenary and partial indulgences.

Here was one:—

MARIA DESOLATA.

Plenary—On receiving Easter Communion, after having meditated on the Desolation of Our Lady, for at least half an hour, between 3 p.m. on Good Friday and 10 a.m. on Holy Saturday.

Partial—300 days, any week, between 3 p.m. on Friday and Sunday morning.

A sneer came involuntarily to his lips.

"An easy road to virtue," he thought.

CHAPTER XXV

PULLING THE WIRES

THIS rencontre with Ethel mightily disturbed his peace of mind. The six years' fortifying of himself against all thought save of work broke down in a moment. It seemed two days ago that he was listening to her self-told tragedy. It was just yesterday that he received her letter from Paris, a little happier, but yet so sad. To-day the thread was taken up again.

Ethel differed from the usual woman whom he met in his professional life. She was not just the subject of a picture. He had heard her sobbing, had seen the bruises on her arm, had been entrusted with her secrets. Out of the depths he had lifted her. And now it seemed as if she might come again into his life.

George was not certain that he felt so much attracted by her now in her rich self-content as when he knew her in her misery. He hated the patronage of money, and all the while she spoke to him she seemed to say, "I am well off, I can afford this beautiful gown. I can give you a good dinner. I am my own mistress. You can't win me so easily now; if I give myself to you, it will be as a favour." Yes, she had encouraged him—he knew the type—damn her!

She spoke as if she were playing a part. Religion was a pose with her. She thought it might appeal to him to play repentant Magdalene. Not that she really had gone wrong—he had saved her from that.

Bah! these were foolish fancies. He was only a casual acquaintance after all, had not seen her for six years, and then only for half an hour. This was just her polite society

manner, she could not help inviting him. He would meet a dozen others at her table—the usual futile crowd. And then her husband—ugh!

Of course her religion was a sham. It was for money that she joined the Roman Catholic Church.

So ran his thoughts.

Yet in Ethel's case religion was no cloak. Morality is so very much a point of view. The creature of mere circumstance passes through varying phases, ashamed when she does wrong, and glowing with her righteousness. We, the impassionate spectators, give her credit for deliberate choice of roads when she herself considers only present comfort. Why should this womanly frame not be attuned to sensuous ritual?

Life for Ethel had been no summer holiday. Her youth was drudgery, romance had darkened into reality, the chance of motherly happiness had been lost through poverty, pain had driven her to a precipice. Then came luxurious ease.

Ease could not give her dreamless nights. Faces recurred, faces reproached her, faces threatened her. Religion could surely bring her respite. In the shadows of the night she could seek refuge with Our Lady of Sorrows.

Ethel had too close acquaintance with the looking-glass not to know her physical charms. She knew she had made an impression on George, who on his part had roused her admiration. His keen, intellectual face, not unhandsome, caught her fancy. His, too, was a generous nature. How many men who had known her as he had known her would have spoken to her as he had spoken to her?

She said to herself that she would not pursue him, but that she would be glad to meet him again. She found that he was making a name for himself in portraiture. She wished he would call, yet she could not blame him for staying away.

A change in her relations with her husband made her think of George still more. She began to have a horrible suspicion that her money was in danger.

George, for his part, was not oblivious. Now that he had met Ethel again it seemed that every one was talking of her. She held a stall at a charity bazaar, assisted by a Duchess, and her photograph was in all the illustrated papers. An officer whose portrait he was painting asked if he knew that pretty Mrs. Greville. Another sitter, a lady, offered him a seat in a box for which her dear friend, Ethel Greville, had sent her tickets. Wouldn't Mr. Grange care to meet her? She would make such a charming portrait.

Other incidents constantly recalled her. The wife of a patron with whom he was dining had noticed him in the Servite Church. Was he a Catholic? No, only a chance visitor. How interesting! Would he care to come next Sunday to the four o'clock Benediction at Farm Street?

George hesitated for a moment and then expressed himself delighted.

As they sat over their wine, another of the guests smiled at him and said:

"Take care, Mr. Grange. Our hostess means to make a Catholic of you. Farm Street is the great Jesuit centre and all the sensational conversions are announced from there. The 4 o'clock Benediction is particularly meant for the intellectuals."

This however only added spice to George's curiosity. The charm of the service he had already attended was not yet forgotten. His mind was of the type that jolts from one groove to another. For the moment he inclined to religion, especially to that sensuous rite of incense, of music and of colour.

His hostess brought a lady friend with her to the service—poor diplomacy, though no doubt well meant tribute to Mrs. Grundy. For this friend was patchouli'd overmuch. In vain the appeal to the finer emotions laid out by clever priests. Beside him was the reek of Bond Street.

And yet it might have been impressive. From before the altar came a low voice, hailing the sweet Mother. "*Ave Maria, gratia plena.*" A deeper harmony grew out of this, a harmony to which another choir gave answer. The

sermon was inlaid with cunning logic, of what avail against the loathsome air? He felt inclined to hit the woman and get out.

George put off his promised call on Ethel. The ordeal of having to face her husband was too much. Reformed him? Perhaps she had, perhaps not. There were nasty stories still about this Wolseley Greville, judging from some casual inquiries. A man of such a past was not likely to be changed. No doubt he found it policy to humour his rich wife.

Besides, George had learned to hate the people of the theatre. In his first London nights, when he haunted galleries, he had built fairy castles for the heroines of the stage. Their faces haunted him, and he heard the virtues in their tender voices. Then came the incident of Kitty Dunlop. From her he despised the whole profession.

Ethel's face was not the only thing that kept George awake at nights. He had his sleepless ambition, and the general's visit made that more incessant in his thoughts than ever.

The Tuesday named by his host for the dinner at the club had come and gone. Not without trepidation George had shaken hands with half a dozen stiff Society men. It was an uncongenial meal. George knew that he was under inspection, and before very long suspected that the general was more enthusiastic about the proposed commission than his fellow members. So far from being almost won, the battle was just beginning, and there were others even than the Lord High Everything Else to be propitiated with appropriate gifts. If his pride were not involved in seeing the matter out to the end, George might have cried off.

However, he was on his mettle now, and meant to hold what he had got. He picked out the two of the Committee who seemed to be the greediest and prevailed on them to accept his hospitality. The general came as well, of course, and smiled understandingly at George as the very *recherché* meal progressed and he perceived the artist's strategy.

"By Gad!" he said in an undertone, as they adjourned to the studio, "the cleverest dinner I ever tasted."

Of course they wanted to see his work and they were now in the humour to be fed with nudes, of which, fortunately for the hopes of his commission, George had a liberal supply.

The Lord High Everything Else was not so hard a nut to crack as his more sophisticated daughter, a darling of the most exasperating carelessness of others' time. When she did come to his studio, she was always in a hurry to be off, and brought with her other butterflies who had the manners of their kind. Before he could complete the portrait the season ended, and she was off to Scotland, leaving him in an atrocious temper. He saw the prize slipping from him.

No wonder that he became morose, suspecting even the general of breaking faith, only to realise next day that the notion was absurd. At last he went to Harley Street.

"Go to the country for a couple of months," said the specialist, "some quiet place with green fields. There's nothing wrong with you except this London."

A week later, down at his old haunt in the Chilterns, George knew that Harley Street was right. Early hours, simple food, the charm of quiet landscape all brought back his normal balance. If he thought of London faces, it was not so much of those who were concerned in this great possible commission, as of the face of Ethel. He wondered whether she ever thought of him, or whether he had merely flitted through her vision. Was it policy for him to call on her? Did her husband really treat her well? When would he ever meet a woman he could really like? How long was he to live this lonely life?

Yet, in the obsession of his daily work out in the open air, even Ethel's memory was obscured, and when he went back to London, he was clear-brained and healthy, fit for anything.

About the third week in October a note came from the general.

"MY DEAR GRANGE,

"It's all clear as daylight now. That article in the *Studio* has done the trick. I was in Scotland shooting with the Lord High Everything Else, and some one of our party had a copy sent to him. Missie got hold of it and so discovered all your greatness. She is impatient to return to town to be finished off, and has been chanting your praises all day long to her august father. Indeed I was eventually packed off to town to lay hold of you and see that you did not run away. She has made the old man promise to fix up the sittings of H.M., and I can see now that she means to eclipse her friends by arranging to have her portrait in the same Academy by the same artist as that of our most gracious Sovereign."

In the quiet of his country life George had almost forgotten Archibald Roe, but Archibald Roe had evidently not forgotten George. Hurrying through breakfast, he stepped out to secure a copy of this fortunate issue.

It was overwhelming.

He was the subject of the opening article; and, if Archibald Roe was right, George was well on the road to immortality. First of all there was a disquisition on Velazquez and Rembrandt with the familiar claptrap about the soul of the age. Then the following:

"To understand George Grange's work, you must have met George Grange himself and seen George Grange at work. By 'work' I do not mean merely the laying of paint upon the canvas. The portrait painter must be a student of human nature, and human nature does not sit all the time upon the model's throne or in the studied attitudes of the conventional portrait. Human nature partakes of food, plays games, talks business, and the student who would understand his fellows must mix among them if he desires to interpret anything besides the superficial form and colour of this passing show.

"No sooner had I entered his studio in Tite Street than I felt I was face to face, heart to heart, with a man of the world, yet not a worldly man, conversant with the foibles of daily life as lived by people who are not merely painters.

Add to this the intense application of his race—he is a Scot—the technical skill which belongs to himself alone of all our younger men, and we have the makings of a consummate portraitist.

“How well I remember the shock which thrilled me five years ago when I met that wonderful canvas of Sir Joshua Felshead! Is this Sargent? I said, painted under another name, or is it Velazquez come to life again in the spirit of the twentieth century? Who is this forthright realist, materialist, who defies convention and utters the living truth? How many millions would any one else than Sir Joshua Felshead have paid not to be portrayed this way? Yet I saw the annotation in the Catalogue referring to this picture, ‘Presentation Portrait—Himself to Himself,’ and knew that the greatest connoisseur of modern times was satisfied with the rude rendering.

“From that moment I had my eye on this young painter—he was evidently young—an older man would not have had such ‘nerve,’ as the Americans say. I rendered tribute to his *Portrait of a Wicked Woman*, with its shimmer of gold and green, to his fairylike *Cynthia Despard*, to his homely *Alderman Adams*, to his sailor-hearted *Admiral Benbow*. Most fascinating of all are his Society women, with their easy condescension, their high-bred daintiness, their pride of feature. These we can feel are women of the world, painted by a man of the world. Only one who has breathed their air could so admirably have caught their atmosphere.

“It is not often that we find so young a painter so happy in his renderings of both men and women. That skill as a rule comes only after long and bitter experience. But George Grange has an old head on young shoulders. Nothing could disturb his equanimity. He analyses and he sympathises. If one might dare to make so mixed a metaphor, one might say that his head and his heart work hand in hand. He is a confident painter, with the confidence that comes of knowledge both of the human form and of human nature.

“Fortunately for his future, his name is not associated with any clique. He is neither Academician nor anti-Academe. Not being an ex-Slade student, he has escaped the New English Art Club, and he has not advertised him-

self sufficiently to be desired by the International. [Editor's Note:—We assume no responsibilities for these opinions, which are those of Mr. Roe.] The road lies straight before him, *sans* barrier, *sans* encumbrance. Who shall say how far he shall step forward on his high destiny?"

Pleased as he was by this effusion, George was not so vain as to forget that all this praise was interested. Mr. Archibald Roe had too plainly revealed his business-like intentions ere they had parted. This was his proof of *bona fides*. Well, in the world of business, perhaps it was part of the game. He sat down at his writing desk and, without further ado, wrote as follows:

"DEAR MR. ROE,

"Many thanks. Twenty per cent.

"Yours,

"GEORGE GRANGE."

As for the Royal portrait, within a fortnight everything was fixed. The sittings were arranged for the following February, early in the month so that it should be in time for the Academy. It was to be hung there if successful as a Command picture. George had not been presented to the King himself, but preliminaries were arranged so that he should make his due appearance at a Levee, shortly before the sittings should commence.

His star was high in the ascendant. He was elected to the Council of the Portraitists—this without canvassing. Yet occasionally he was reminded that good fortune had its attendant perils. Clotter one day met him in Pall Mall. The amateur, who had recently returned from Paris, now lived in the celebrity of his artistic set.

"The very man I wanted," cried Clotter, clapping his shoulder. "I have a treat in store for you. Come and dine with me to-night at the Carlton. No, I will take no refusal. You must meet my old friend and dear master, Spellagro, the great Spanish portraitist. Ah, he is one of the real immortals. You know his magnificent portrait of

the Comtesse de Blagovestchenk, and that great, that masterly rendering of Menzel—*au moment imprévu*, don't you know—unique blend of Velazquez and Parisian *esprit*."

George confessed a vague recollection of the latter portrait in an American Magazine.

"No doubt, no doubt! Just come from the States, passing through London on his way to Paris. He is an idol there. But you will come."

Such importunity is best evaded by submission, so George accepted.

"The fact is," said Clotter, who arrived at the restaurant before his Spanish guest, "I want you to do me a favour. Spellagro has had a most unfortunate experience on the other side—under a cloud, so to speak, owing to his Spanish blood and ignorance of our Anglo-Saxon notions. To be frank, he got mixed up in a divorce case over there, kissed a sitter, don't you know, and was found out. Result, he got no more Society portraits—husbands, fathers and brothers objected, don't you know. Wouldn't let their womenfolk sit to him. Absurd that genius should suffer for such trifles! When you have seen his work you will understand—glorious, I tell you, nothing like it since Velazquez."

George groaned inwardly.

"And now," continued this Niagara, "you are the very man. I hear you have been elected to the Council of the Portraitists. With your influence you can get some of Spellagro's portraits well hung at your next Exhibition. He thinks of setting up here in London. In Paris there are so many brilliant artists—I mean—that is to say—of course, he is far above them, Carolus not excepted—but you understand, he thinks that there is more money to be made here, and if he makes *furore* at your Exhibition, he will have all our beauties at his feet. But here he is. Ah, *cher maître!*"

The name and tale had led George to expect a killing Andalusian, romance clinging to his eyelashes. He saw instead a little, snub-nosed man, so straggly that he seemed held together only by his clothes. The host called the

abortion "*cher maître*" till George felt sick. The little man was in one way worthy of his reputation. He ogled every woman in the room. George, as he compared this Simian genius to the English types at the neighbouring tables, wished him joy of his chase.

Next day Spellagro's pictures were inspected. They were what George expected—brilliant in drawing, but in colour vicious, the work of a decadent. He escaped as politely as he could, firmly resolved to keep them out if he possibly could.

The incident, however, left a nasty taste. These were the penalties of success. Was his time to be taken up by backdoor canvassing? And what new danger was this that he heard of, a portrait painter's career ruined by his private reputation? He had never thought of that. Lucky for him he had kept so clear of women. He must be careful. One might so easily get mixed up in the intrigues that lurk behind so many portraits.

And now above all things he must be particularly careful. There was this portrait of the King, on which his whole career depended. A breath of scandal would annihilate his chances; he had seen it happen before in the case of a brilliant sculptor, far greater as a sculptor than George was as a painter.

No, George knew that he could chance no risks. Perhaps the best thing would be to keep all women out of his studio till the King's portrait had been painted.

Yet no—he must make some exceptions. There were some commissions that he must complete. But apart from these, women must be barred.

He had too much at stake.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FIRST NIGHT

OPENING his correspondence next day he found two missives. One was the usual weekly invitation from Mrs. Harriet Miggs to purchase his discarded suits, false teeth, etc., for sterling prices. The other was a ticket for a first night. There was no letter with this, and he could not recognise the handwriting. Consulting the paper, he found the play was written by an author whose portrait he had recently painted. The man had been amusing, although a trifle bumptious—"Bombastes Spurio" the portrait had been nicknamed by the *Cynic*. A first night would be a new experience.

The pavement outside the theatre was lined with distant followers of the great, anxious to recognise and name their heroes. George was surprised to hear himself referred to as Mr. Abraham Joseph, the distinguished pleader. He had never realised that he could be mistaken for a Jew.

That gave him an idea. He must paint his own portrait—very quiet and low in tone.

Then came the buzz of the theatre. People evidently knew each other—of course the dramatic critics. What an ugly lot they were! And the women! Hardly a face worth a second glance.

Still there were a few—actresses, no doubt. Yes, that was certainly an actress. Of course she played Juliet somewhere, he had forgotten the name. There was the author beside him in the stage box. The latter saw George and leaned over to speak.

"Didn't expect to find you here. Very good of you to come. Don't hiss me at the end or you shall never paint my portrait again."

After this, all through the first act, George racked his brain, wondering who could have invited him.

At the first curtain his eyes lifted to a gleam of golden hair in a box above him on the other side. It was Ethel.

She nodded to him, and seemed half to beckon with her fan. Then some one interrupted from behind.

Ethel must have sent the ticket!

Should he go and speak to her? She had friends with her just now. Perhaps later.

Just before the curtain rose against he looked once more. Her eyes met his, but darkness intervened.

The next act bored him horribly. If the author had not been at his elbow he would have gone out. Still he had better wait.

At the interval she beckoned again, so he resolved to go. He must at the same time apologise for not calling.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said. "I was afraid my invitation would have been too late."

"So it was you that sent the ticket?"

"Why, of course. Didn't you get my letter?"

"No, just a ticket, and I did not remember the handwriting on the envelope."

Her face clouded, and then she smiled.

"It must have slipped out somehow. I asked you to join my supper party after the theatre. You really must come. You never called as you promised, and you owe me a visit."

"Oh," said George, confused, "I'm sorry. I've been so busy somehow. It's very kind of you to ask me. But I should feel rather out of it, you know. I care so little for plays and theatres, and your friends are——"

"Come now, no excuses. You must not back out. Besides, there won't be many of us. My husband is out of town, so that is one less. And we can talk of other things than plays. Just for the sake of old—that is, just to please me."

Her appeal was made so winningly. Moreover, he would not have to meet Wolseley Greville—she said he was out

of town. All the same he hated the thought of entering the house of that scoundrel. Ethel, however, would not let him escape.

"Wait for me at the entrance, and I'll take you home in my brougham."

Brougham! The word somehow made George smile as he went back to his seat. How vividly it recalled that walk to the Langham six years ago, when she was a model and he a student. He had been chaffing her, hadn't he? Ah, yes. "Every model," he had said, "was once an actress, and every actress has a brougham." Did she remember that, too? Or did she want to forget?

Bother! He had forgotten his latch-key. There was time to rush home for it. But what would the author say? Happy thought, he could get out of the supper with this excuse.

"Your latch-key!" she said, with a laugh, when he made his plea. "Come now, that's too stale for me. Besides, I could put you up if need be. Good-bye, dear," waving to a friend. "What's the proverb, 'Love laughs at locksmiths.' Oh, dear, what am I saying?"

The brougham held just two, but no doubt the others were coming on separately. She chatted brightly as they sped along.

"Luxury does suit her," thought George. "She's charming. Just a little bit affected."

In that comfortable carriage, with the windows closed and a pretty woman beside him, a temptation to flirt was natural. Casual words told him that she was willing. But the memory of Spellagro held him back. "No married flirt for me," he said to himself.

They stopped and a door opened.

"Here we are," she said. "Ugh, how cold it is! I hope there's a fire. Supper ready?" This to the footman. "Show this gentleman into the drawing-room, while I take off my wraps. I shan't be a minute."

It was quite a theatrical drawing-room, full of signed photographs of well-known players. At the same time not

many actors could have afforded such furniture. Henri II prevailed. She must have money. Good taste, too, for the ornaments were well placed. Two pictures were on the walls, one of Garrick and the other—hullo! he had seen that before at Eberhard Grundstein's, the dealer in forged master-pieces and antiquities. Now it was entitled "Portrait of a Lady," by Gainsborough.

Should he tell her the history of that picture? Perhaps she would not thank him. After all, it matched the room; but it made him doubt the furniture.

What a world!

Over the mantelpiece was a recent photograph of Wolseley Greville—more of a blackguard in appearance than ever. His head was almost bald, the left eyelid drooped, the cheeks were bloated, and the lips hung unconsciously in a lascivious leer. It was a face that made George shiver. He remembered that haunt of thieves and criminals that he used to frequent with Ravin. Yes, there was that nameless Something that hall-marked villainy. Never again would he enter the house of such a host. Reformed indeed? Sir Joshua Felshead had an angel face compared to this.

Why did the other guests not make their appearance? The hostess, too, was slow.

Ah, there was a ring!

He had been there twenty minutes now.

"This way, sir," said a footman, opening the door.

Assuming a calmness that he was far from feeling, George stepped after the servant into a cosy room where supper was laid.

Ethel was fingering the flowers in a vase.

She came fragrant with violets, and she was alone.

"Such a nuisance!" she cried. "Just had a 'phone from the others saying that they could not come after all. We shall have to entertain each other."

The table was laid for two only. There had certainly been an interval between the ring he had heard and the footman's appearance.

Ethel was quite self-possessed.

"You say you've not got your key. You would like to get away early. And I'm awfully hungry, aren't you?"

"Just as you like—I am at your disposal."

"Yes, to be sure." She rang the bell. "You need not wait, John," she said to the footman.

The man bowed and left, after opening a bottle of Mumm.

"We help ourselves here," said Ethel, seating herself with a laugh at the head of the table. "I do hate servants. Don't you think the Bohemian way is much better? Servants listen to what one says, and things get about. Besides I have been longing for a quiet *tête-à-tête* with you. How strange that my invitation to you was not enclosed. I think I understand now, but it does not matter. Wasn't the play dull? I wanted to get away earlier, but one has to be polite at first nights."

Ethel chatted on vivaciously, but her voice came blurred to his ears. He suddenly noticed that the Mumm was almost finished, though he had not touched his glass.

"Come now. You are distrait. What a wretched appetite you have." The voice became clearer. "I believe you are half asleep. It certainly was a tiresome play. You owe me a grudge for that ticket. Come and sit by the fire, while I make you some coffee—my own brew."

George obeyed mechanically. As she bent over, he noticed for the first time how low her dress was cut. This was not the gown she wore at the theatre.

"I must go," he said, starting up.

"Oh, don't go. It's—it's—besides—I say, you won't be angry with me, will you? I want to ask your advice about something. I have a confession to make. The fact is," she said under her eyelashes, "I have quarrelled with Wolseley. He doesn't live here now."

"Quarrelled?" exclaimed George.

"Hush!" she whispered excitedly, "the servants will hear."

"Let them hear. I don't understand you. You asked

me here to meet your friends. We are alone. What does it all mean?"

"Oh, don't be angry, George——"

"*Mr. Grange.*"

"*Mr. Grange*, it was only my foolishness. I did so want to speak to you quietly, alone—just a little chat. I am in such trouble. You have been so kind. It was a silly trick, but I could think of no other way of speaking to you alone. You never called, and my letters are opened, I am sure. These servants are paid spies. I am shadowed wherever I go——"

"Shadowed?"

"Yes, by his detectives. He wants to divorce me now that he has spent all my money, and Jacobs and Jacobs, his solicitors, have set men on to watch me—they are probably outside the house now."

"Now!" George almost shouted. "Do you mean that I am to be mixed up in this? Is my name to be dragged into the Courts—visiting you alone at night? What of my career? Don't you see that this will ruin me in my profession? Here have I been slaving away night and day for all these years with the one ambition to be a great portrait painter. I have just got a commission to paint the King, and you in your silly, criminal folly go and ruin me. Oh, you—you——"

He choked with emotion.

"I never thought of that," she panted. "What have I done?"

He glared at her, and though his lips could frame no sound, she knew his repulsion. He saw in her eyes what had led her to lay this trap for him—trap it was, in which he had been fairly caught. She had not mixed with actresses for nothing. He had been fooled. He saw his name starred in the evening rags:

ARTIST'S AMOURS—NOCTURNAL VISITS.

He would be laughed at by men he hated, and cut by women he despised. Gone all hopes of that Royal por-

trait. His place would be with vermin like Spellagro, at back doors. And all to gratify this creature's fancy. What an ass he had been to think she was ever an honest woman. Oh, this veneer of luxury and religion!

She made a last effort.

"Is it too late?" she whispered, honey in her voice. "Even if it is, cannot we——?"

"You filthy and abominable woman!" he cried.

Flinging her from him, he ran down the stairs to the hall. Hat and coat were there, and the latch was loose. Stop a moment, for breath. Towering with rage, he yet pulled himself together, and walked as steadily as he could down the stone steps into the street.

In an ague of self-loathing Ethel crouched upon the hearth. Two centuries had passed in those two hours. Oh, the contempt of him!

At first she had heard the passing hansoms, the occasional whistle, the policeman acknowledging "fine night." Everything was so crisp and hard on that, the first frosty night of the year. Then she could only remember and spit upon herself.

And yet she had never thought of what she was doing, but had drifted from one current to another. She had in truth asked others to this supper-party, and it was only during the third act, after she had seen George, that they told her they could not come. Then somehow she formed a mad plan—she could not live in this loveless way any longer—she must have friendship with some one. George Grange thought her beautiful—she knew he did—and she *was* beautiful. Why should she not try? What matter if Wolseley were watching her? She need not tell——

Oh, fool that she was to let it slip out! And yet how could she help telling him. She did not realise how much it meant to him, that she was ruining his career. At least that was in her favour—it was no calculated plan, only impulse.

What an impulse! Had it come to this that she must so

debase herself for a man, must make herself carrion in the hope that he might prove vulture?

How could she have fallen so low? Had she ever been anything but low?

Now this offering of herself, and the spurning of her—"filthy and abominable woman!"

She would be utterly cast out both by honest folk and by those who only remember riches. She was utterly ruined now—broken with debt. That very day a valuer had told her that the furniture on which she had spent so much was worth only a few hundreds.

"Impossible!" she cried. "It cost me thousands. It is all old and genuine. My husband is an amateur and bought it for me. He knows what is good."

"An amateur?" smiled the expert. "That accounts for it. All the easier to cheat."

It was only afterwards that she remembered a strange letter she had found from Eberhard Grundstein, enclosing a substantial cheque. That explained it all. Her husband knew the furniture and pictures were counterfeit, but had shared the spoils with his confederates. That was at the very beginning, too, when he was pretending to reform. Blackguard!

At last she realised how thoroughly she had been fooled. As likely as not Wolseley was boasting among his parasites how he had swindled her. That was just the kind of thing he would do. How she loathed these toadying women. She knew they hated her, cats after her cupboard.

Now that she was ruined, how could she live? A model again? No, not in London. Those women would get to know. Wolseley would blackmail her. She had ruined the happiness of one artist. That was enough. Besides, George Grange would find out, would tell his artist friends, and hound her out of Chelsea.

Drink! She would drown herself in that.

She must have been drunk to-night; he must have thought so, too, before she could so utterly have lost her self-control. He himself had not touched his glass. Well, well, since

she had gone so far she might as well finish it all. She could drink herself soon enough to death.

Trying to rise, she found her limbs like lead, and sank back upon the rug. The uttermost red faded from the embers and from her face. Ashes there and here. It was living death.

When at last Ethel recovered from her trance she was bitter cold. Her very heart was ice.

"Mary, Mother of Jesus," she cried in passionate supplication, "have pity, have pity upon me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

NERVES.

GEORGE was in no mood to go home. Sleep was impossible. He must bathe his thoughts in the cool air.

Hopelessly compromised! Ethel's letter had evidently been opened, and his name was known. The invitation had been abstracted, no doubt to serve as evidence against him. He must have been more than an hour in the house and at such an hour! Oh, it was damning!

How blindly he had walked into the trap! And yet she had been clever, had not flung herself at his head too soon. She had been simply friendly, and he was deceived by her show of wealth.

So her money was all spent now! He was to be her new—protector! She might have done it without thinking, indeed most probably. Money must be her aim, and she was cutting the ground from beneath her own feet when she deprived him of his profession. She was fool as well as knave.

A pretty fool too, else he would have been more wide awake. If she had been plain, would he have thought twice about her?

Yet he had meant nothing. Not a word that he had said suggested love. But who had heard what he had said? The circumstances were all the world would know of. They covered him like night.

Was it mere blackmail? Was she leagued with her husband still, and the divorce a blind? She had urged him to stay. Perhaps that was to give the angry husband time to interrupt. No, it would not be that. Yet she had led

up to something. As he retraced the evening, he could see she knew they would be alone. It was simply—lust.

Morning found him still on the Embankment. A laugh reminded him that he was still in evening dress. He went home to change.

After breakfast an idea struck him. It was risky, but something desperate must be done. Ten o'clock now, and business men would already be at work. He gave a cabman the address of Jacobs and Jacobs.

His card admitted him to a waiting-room, where he was glad to find himself alone. Then he was summoned to an office, where a keen-faced, clean-shaven man rose to meet him.

"Sir Joseph Jacobs?"

"I am his partner. Sir Joseph is seen only by appointment."

"The matter is urgent, connected with a case which I understand is in the hands of your firm—the divorce of Mr. Wolseley Greville."

"To be sure."

The lawyer touched a button, and a clerk appeared.

"Let me have the Greville file."

"What I have to say," continued George, "is perhaps not according to etiquette—I am an artist——"

"A very clever artist," said the lawyer. "I know and admire your work."

This was more encouraging.

"What I have to say may tell against me, but I prefer to be frank. I am in a devil of a hole."

"And want us to pull you out? That is our profession."

"Yes," said George, "but you are against me. You, I understand, are acting for Mr. Greville. Now I may be one of the co-respondents."

"Ah," said the lawyer, turning over the leaves of the file. "You think there are more than one? Let me see—h'm, ha—To be sure—I beg your pardon—Is that so? Well, in case you are afraid of etiquette, we lawyers have a pleasant

fiction for such cases. Suppose you say what you have to say 'without prejudice,' as we call it."

George had made up his mind to be frank, etiquette or no etiquette. He told his whole story, explaining that midnight visit.

"H'm, ha, h'm," said the lawyer, watching him keenly. "You need say no more. I understand. You have perhaps made no mistake in coming to us. I shall remember what you have told me, but I can make no promises—you understand. Most unfortunate affair. You can't touch pitch—you know the proverb."

"Too well," said George. "Too well. I must apologise for taking up so much of your time. Is there any fee?"

"My dear sir, not to you. Perhaps some day you will let me visit your studio. Well, you must excuse me just now—busy day to-day, this Neville case coming on. Good morning."

George went away, full of gratitude for the lawyer's consideration.

This was one load off his mind, but there was still a load untouched. He had done his best in the circumstances, but what circumstances they still were!

The absence of sleep made his temper all day atrocious.

He hurried back to keep an appointment with a middle-aged woman of Society, whose portrait he was painting, and who would not be put off. As usual she was half an hour late, and as she had only an hour to spare him from the gaieties that kept her alive from eleven to three next morning, he paced the studio in growing rage. At last she sailed in dressed in white silk. He was painting her in mauve.

"Do be quick," she said, plumping down in the chair prepared for her, and holding up her chin like a meat-axe.

"Your dress, Lady FitzJames?" he said, as quietly as he could.

"Oh, yes, I have changed my mind. I wish to be done in white."

As she spoke she lifted her *lorgnette* and stared insolently.

George folded his arms.

"If you mistake me for the door-mat," he said, "it's time you went to an oculist."

When she recovered her breath she sailed out, smiling mischief.

"There goes an enemy," said he to a neighbouring artist, who happened to come in as she went out.

"Dangerous, I should say," replied that worthy, "judging from her supply of powder. I say, old chap, can you lend me some rose madder?"

A lady called in the afternoon to see the picture of her son, a guardsman, which George had intended for the Portraitists. She was one of those of whom one feels instinctively that some one married her for her money.

"Oh, how like him!" she gushed through her protruding teeth. "It is splendid. There is only one thing that I might suggest. You do not show the whole of the red band. Now dear Charles looks so handsome in his red band. It is so bright. But you have made part of it quite dark."

"Of course," said George. "That is how one suggests the modelling of the body. If it were of the same brightness all round, the values and the perspective would be lost."

"Oh, but for my sake, Mr. Grange, for his mother, could you not alter it? I should be so pleased if you did. I always think of it as all red."

How he hated these Philistines that wanted foolish changes!

"Impossible," he snapped.

She was not to be rebuffed.

"Oh, no, surely not," she said, patting him on the shoulder. "Now just do it. It only wants a touch."

George hesitated. Then took his palette and a brush.

"Is that what you want?" he said, slinging vermilion round the waist.

"Yes, yes! lovely!" she cried.

"There's still one more touch," and with another flick of his brush he wiped out the signature.

She paled, but was perhaps too well-bred to protest.

"I am sorry," she said, as she left the studio.

"Another enemy," he thought, and flung his palette into a corner.

That night his eyes seared his fitful slumbers. He dreamed that on either side of him stretched endless desert, ridged like an ocean fixed eternally. His breast was as a road, over which trod the hoofs of countless horses. On and on swept the relentless army, his eyelashes their white-hot spears. Prometheus, vulture-torn and chained, had suffered no such agony. Movement was of another world, for he was petrified in dreams.

A sun of citron and of orange mocked his misery. Such thirst suggested and unquenched was surely fed by flames.

Then slowly, but so eagerly anticipated, crept pale shade towards him. Nearer, nearer, though with his head gripped down he could but guess its presence. Was it earth whirling to destruction, or only the sun sinking, that lifted Something from that fierce horizon? It was the shadow of that Something whose slow and torturing feet he seemed to hear.

A little higher, and a little nearer. Through the glow of fire he could at last shape a face—and breasts—and claws. It was the Shadow of the Sphinx.

The sun was now an aureole round that pitiless head. Surely the shadow was of death. He was ripped with chill more fierce than fire.

Ah, no Sphinx! That aureole of golden hair, that face, that dress cut low, those arms stretched out—the shadow at his heart!

He shivered and awoke, only to dream again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NATHANIEL REID TO THE RESCUE.

ANOTHER terrible night. Fever fattened on such a maimed ambition. For eight years now his only atmosphere had been in art. But under this menace how could he work? He was at Wolseley Greville's mercy, and he knew that face too well to hope for a light escape. The danger might threaten him for years, and he might even have to parry it with all his savings, certainly with his self-respect.

Cursed woman! What had he done to Ethel that she should crush his life? To think himself the catspaw of such intrigue! Yet one woman was as bad as another. How often had his own studio been a secret rendezvous for married women, the portrait merely an excuse. Women were rotten, rotten to the core!

In his despair he thought of Reid, that true-hearted son of Nature who had given him his first start. For years no word had passed between them, but surely Reid had a kind remembrance of him; Mrs. Middleton's last letter was emphatic on that point. No man of the world, perhaps, but still with such a sympathy.

George's letter was answered by the laconic telegram, "Coming."

Unspeakable relief! To the lonely man, a little means so much. Reid was not rich, yet had clearly never hesitated before the expense of the journey.

Telling his man to admit no visitors and to prepare a room for Reid, George fell into an easy sleep, waking in the afternoon much relieved.

George was still depressed when he went to Euston that

evening, but the veracious chronicler must put this down to indigestion.

The same old Reid! A touch more of grey in the beard and whiskers, but that was all. Still that cheery face, rough and radiant with the open air. His luggage was a faded old umbrella.

"How times come back!" said George as they drove in a hansom to his lodging. "You mind me of the old sea-smell that we used to get on Balgownie links. Still pegging away?"

"Ay, sonny, still peggin'."

"Not married yet?"

"No, no, sonny. It's only the young fools that play about wi' women."

George laughed a trifle ruefully.

"Glad to hear ye laugh, sonny," said Reid, patting him on the knee. "It shows that we are not at the bottom of the sea yet. Man, is there any place here in London where you can get a drop of Scotch, with somethin' to it? I'm just famishin'. There's no food like real food, and I'm fair sick of sandwiches."

"We're just home," said George.

"What!" exclaimed Reid, when the latter handed cabby half-a-crown. "Man, I can see ye're clean daft. We could have got here in a bus for threepence."

"Maybe," said George slyly, "but then what should we have done about the luggage? I didn't know you were coming to stay so long."

"Man, I thought you would be rich and fat now, so that you would have some spare pyjamas to fit me."

Then, when they came to supper, Reid traversed the food at ninety miles an hour, while George toyed with his.

"Ay," said the older man, quaffing nobly, "this is the real old Sandy. Drown your sorrows in drink, sonny, not more than three glasses, with hot water and lemon and sugar to taste. And now for a pipe. Fegs, man! Put away thon cigarette. Chewin's a bad habit. Soock, man, soock, like a new-born babe."

So they went on in the old familiar way, coarse perhaps, just as the earth is coarse, and the sun and the sea. It did George a world of good.

"And now, sonny, what's the trouble? Ye're hand-writing's like a hen's scrawl; sign of genius, of course, but I'm no chicken, and my old eyes couldn't make it out exactly."

George poked the fire, and over the prescription that Reid had recommended for sorrows told the whole story.

"Ay, man, that's a gey pickle. We'll hae to sleep on it. I'll let ye off the early mornin' sketch just for once, and when we've had a look at your pictures we'll see what can be done. Take my advice and never try a big jump when ye're tired. Breakfast seven o'clock sharp."

At seven next morning Reid was still fast asleep. George chuckled, but put the clock back and got out his canvases. Several of these were lying there as they had come back from exhibitions, still unpacked. The owners were out of town and he had not troubled to touch them. Now, however, he would give Reid an idea of the progress he had made.

"There's one thing I pride myself on," said Reid, as he shambled in to breakfast. "I'm an early riser. I never feel myself if I don't have a bite by seven. Man, ye get yer papers right early here!" he added, seeing George with his fashionable journal. "What's the news?"

"Oh, I just get it for the social intelligence," said George. "Ah, this will interest you: 'Mr. Nathaniel Reid, A.R.S.A., has arrived in London.'"

"What!" shouted Reid, rushing at the paper. "Oh man, ye're at yer old tricks. Guid sakes, who put that in?"

"Some little bird," said George, smiling at his little joke. It was a guinea well spent.

After breakfast they went round to examine the pictures, Reid grunting and humphing like one of Kipling's camels. Then he went to the chesterfield while George put back the canvases.

Reid broke the silence.

"There's one thing, sonny, that makes me proud of you."

"Yes?" said George, very self-conscious.

"And that is that ye've not altogether lost yer Scotch accent."

George had a return of indigestion.

"I'm no jokin'," continued Reid. "It gives me great hopes of ye and I'll tell ye for why. It's like this, sonny. I see yon classical johnnies goin' up from King's College in Aberdeen to Oxford and comin' back wi' a drawl fit to turn yer nose up. But it's no like that wi' you."

In a humbler spirit George sat down by his old friend.

"Now, to my mind," Reid went on, "ye've made mighty progress; I wouldn't hae thought it possible. But I'm just fearin' that ye're on the wrong lines, like. It's the Scotch accent that gives me hopes. I watched ye showin' me yer pictures, an' shootin' out yer cuffs like a wee peacock, but then I heard yer vowels, an' I knew ye were still a man. Thank God for it! Now, I've watched this English an' American notion of paintin', terrible clever it is, wi' rapid snatchin' at effects. These chaps think they can get a complete effect in one day's paintin', or thereabouts. Man, they should have been born three hundred years ago, and given that tip to Titian. Think o' the grandest portrait painter the world has ever seen, and think of the laborious way he thought of and put on his paint—the magnificent underpaintin' and the wrastlin' an' care an' love on the top of it. Remember that it was him, that it was Titian, who said that an improvisation is not the finest poetry. Now the great characteristic of Scottish paintin' is that one thing, quality. Quality, man! Burn the word in yer breeches! If there's any school of paintin' worth followin' beside the school of nature, it's the school of the Venetians. These English and American chaps have got no guts. D'ye follow?"

"Fire ahead."

"Colour upon colour, and the use of broken colour in one tone—these are the things that make a picture glow with

permanent beauty. Now Titian could do that in a portrait because he could command his own time and his own terms. In these days, a johnny who wants his portrait painted canna be bothered. That's the vera reason I am glad ye have got into this pickle. My advice is, chuck portraits altogether, at least for a while. Yer present trouble may be the best for ye in the end. For, mind this, sonny," he added as George was interrupting, "ye've got the makin's of a grand painter in ye. Ye've faced the drudgery of drawin'. Now ye must face the drudgery of paint. Ye must analyse more, in order that ye may create."

"Well, I suppose you are right," said George huskily. "But tell me more about this method. How am I to set about it?"

"A hundred years ago there was a quack who sold the fashionable artists the so-called secret of Titian, at ten guineas a head. This I will impart to ye for love, having borrowed twopence to buy it myself off'n a second-hand bookstall."

So saying, he produced from his pocket two tattered leaves from an old number of the *Fortnightly*—apparently an excerpt from an article on Millais. In this was printed a translation from an Italian called Boschini, which the old Scot proceeded to read with deliberate emphasis.

"'Titian,'" he read, "'smothered his canvases with a mass of colour that made, so to speak, a bed or base for the touches which he painted over it. And I also have seen him, with resolute strokes and brushes full of colour, filling the same brush sometimes with light red to serve as a half-tint, sometimes with white, rose, black or yellow—with his amount of knowledge, in four dashes of the brush, giving the promise of a rare figure. After having made these precious foundations for his pictures, he turned the canvases to the wall and there he left them some months without looking at them. When he wished to paint on them again he first examined them with a very critical observation, as if they were his worst enemies, to see what he could find in

them, and if he found anything which was discordant with the delicacy of the intention of his art, as a beneficent surgeon operates on the infirm, he applied himself to reduce any swelling or superabundance of flesh, or to putting right an arm if the form of the bony structure was not properly adjusted, or putting in its place a foot that had taken a discordant posture, and so on, without pity for its pains.

“Working in this way he constructed the figure and reduced it to the most perfect symmetry that could represent the beauty of nature and of art. Having done this, he worked from time to time on them till he covered his figures as it were with live flesh, perfecting with such wonderful touch that at last only the breath seemed wanting. He never did a figure at once, and used to say that any one who improvised could never make verses that were profound or really well put together. The essence of the finish, of the last touches, he put on from time to time with rubs of his fingers, in the high lights approximating them, blending one tint with another, and again with a touch of his finger putting in a dark stroke in some angle to enforce it, or a touch of rose, like a drop of blood that seems to give life to the surface, like touches creeping on gradually, and so perfecting his animated figures. And Palma attested the fact that in finishing he painted more with his fingers than with the brush.’”

“There’s something in that,” said George. “But how am I to work like that? It is impossible to find time for that way with portraits, as you yourself admit. They are hard enough to get as it is.”

“Money, money again!” said Reid. “How many a clever artist blinds himself with this love for money, forsaking the narrow way for the broad path of portraits. Chuck them, man, chuck them.”

“It wasn’t money I was thinking of,” said George, colouring. “It was my ambition.”

Then for the first time he wholly revealed the thought that had urged him on so eagerly. It was not easy to

confess, for it betrayed conceit, and Reid had hammered that.

"What must I do to be saved?" added George, as Reid stayed silent.

"Cut yerself adrift, sonny, cut yerself adrift. Ye've got yon money of yer own still, haven't ye?"

"Yes, and I've saved a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds too much, except that ye'll need a mighty lot to put away on materials. Ye must leave London. Why not go to Paris? The grand thing about Paris is that ye're in an atmosphere of art—the good men there work like hell. Give yerself at least two years to experiment, and then try what ye can do. And keep clear of women if ye can. If ye can't, make the best of them. Fit them into yer work, don't let the work fit them. Ay, but I can trust ye there. Now, we've done our lessons. Come on round to the National Gallery."

George rushed down the stairs three steps at a time.

"Canny, man, canny!" said Reid, panting behind, but he was very happy. He was proud of his pupil's progress, and glad that he had been able to help him.

George understood what Christian must have felt at the top of the Hill of Difficulty. The future no longer loomed terrible before him. It was mysterious still, but it grew lighter, lighter.

Reid went back to Scotland next day. He had sown the seed. Time must do the rest.

CHAPTER XXIX

PARIS

THE sun had never seemed to shine so brightly as on that beautiful October morning. Down the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter the omnibus with its three white sturdy horses had swung in and out of the bluest and most translucent shadows that George had ever seen. As for the Parisians themselves, he was amazed that such colour could be found in Western costume. The workmen with their spacious trousers narrowing down to the ankle, the little bare-headed women, so dainty and so chic, the students with their gorgeous ties, all placarded themselves more vividly because they were so new, so different from the sombre London which he had been so glad to leave. Then when they had swept over the bridge and rattled through the Louvre into the broad open Avenue de l'Opera, he let loose his excitement and leaned so dangerously over the rail that a nervous neighbour pulled him back.

At the Opera George alighted and turned back the way he had come to view this wonderful world all over again. Now it was the passers-by, now the shop-windows that claimed his notice. The countryman fresh to London walks about open-mouthed at the war of traffic and the whirl of humanity, but what rustic could have so much to wonder at as this artist fresh to the latest Babylon?

Over the bridge again and through the narrow streets and then—ah, the Luxembourg, with the wonderful bronzes in the open air beside! It must have been somewhere here that Ravin lived during the terrible orgies of the Commune. Ravin had told him of the days of child-

hood, when he used to waken to the shriek and roar of *mitrailleuses*. First the cries of the Communists led in their fifties before that pitiless wall. Then the sharp word of command and the hail of sound, sweeping so many souls into eternity. Ravin's own mother had almost perished in that maelstrom. She had harboured priests whom the Communists would have killed, and her compassion had almost cost her own life. Then, when the tables were turned, and Gallifet had drunk the blood of Paris, she had been called as witness to identify two of those who had threatened her in her own house. So gentle a spirit revolted against such retribution, and at the risk of death she had denied all knowledge of her former enemies. George's blood boiled as he thought of all that had been done and suffered in the name of Freedom. And yet the Communists had little else to look for. Had not they, too, marched through the streets in their brief, reckless triumph, shooting at sight any man who wore the sign of Government, the regulation boot?

The words of a song heard with Ravin at an Anarchist meeting in Soho came into his mind. They parodied an old Moody and Sankey hymn, which he himself had sung in Aberdeen as a boy in the Band of Hope:

“There are ninety and nine that work and die
In want and hunger and cold,
And one that lives in luxury
In the lap of the silken fold,
And ninety and nine in their hovels bare,
And one in a palace of riches rare.

With the sweat of their brows the desert blooms
And the forest before them falls.
Their labour has builded humble homes,
And cities with lofty halls,
And the one owns cities and houses and lands,
And the ninety and nine have empty hands.

But the night so dreary and dark and long
At last shall the morning bring,

And over the land the victors' song
Of the ninety and nine shall ring,
And echo afar from zone to zone,
Rejoice, for Labour shall have its own!"

The song had sung itself into his heart. He looked about him now and saw the artisans of Paris with the earth in their cheek-bones. These were the men who built up the riches that prodigals squandered; the children of the Revolution, a Revolution that would surely come again.

In his reverie he had sauntered back to the Seine. There he was brought back to actual life by the rush of a steamboat gay with colour. In a moment he was thrallèd by the Enchanted City. The struggle of the labourer, the arrogance of the rich, had passed from his mind. All that he could see or feel was beauty.

In a few days he had settled down to work, following the new lines that Reid had suggested, with infinite patience studying the problems of translucent colour. Yet colour alone without a subject was not sufficient for his imagination. He turned to his old love, poetry, and in his well-thumbed Keats found all the subjects that he wanted.

His rooms were near the Luxembourg, over a carpenter's shop, and at six each morning the sawing and the hammering awakened him. Up he sprang in splendid spirits to his two-sou breakfast, a cup of coffee and a *croissant*. At twelve he sauntered out to the *crémèrie* close by, where an egg and cheese were an Olympian banquet.

His afternoons he spent either at the Louvre or at the Luxembourg among the moderns, passing on at half-past four to the short-pose class at Colarossi's.

Evening had another tale to tell.

Under the lamplights Paris is indeed the city of rumoured pleasure. By day she is the busy, thrifty populace that opens the shop at eight and does not close again till seven. By night she has earned her right to have a good time, and a right good time she has—sometimes with the family, sometimes without—on the boulevards, in the music halls, the theatres, the circus, the restaurants—talking, gesticu-

lating, laughing, enjoying—bubbling over with life just as the wine which is *spumante*.

An inexhaustible study for such as George. The little notebook was never out of his hand. In Paris the artist is part of the picture.

For the modest sum of fifty centimes a day, Colarossi's studio, or atelier, or whatever you like to call it, provided the casual or strenuous artist in Paris with two hours of excellent practice in rapid drawing from the life. The model gave four short poses, just long enough for the accomplished to complete a record and for the beginner to despair. The older men came here as often as the younger ones, for the artist in Paris, however great, is still a student and likes to keep in touch with the coming generation.

For George the school provided an introduction to the Latin Quarter and to the models that he required. The studio was old enough to have attracted types from everywhere—Germans, Swedes, Russians, Americans, as well as French. A sprinkling of women came as a surprise to George, considering the undraped model. They were mostly German, wearing æsthetic sacques, which he found they called Reform clothes.

Coming there every day he naturally made acquaintances.

"Which do you think is the better, Rembrandt or Velazquez?" said an American beside him one day.

"Never thought of comparing them," said George, a little smiling. "Each in his own way is superlative."

"You've hit it. But, say, don't you think Titian just bully?"

"Bully?"

"Yes, bully—fine. Guess you're an Englishman from the cut of your pants. Can't say I like Englishmen—they give us the glad hand and the marble heart. Say, but ain't this a hell of a burg. Have you seen the sights yet? Gee-whiz!"

The pose ended. George offered his neighbour a cigarette.

"Not for me, old man, never smoke nor drink." Then,

looking at George's sketch, "By golly! you can draw some. Julian's or Beaux Arts? What, London! Tell me another. Say, any chance for a portrait painter over there? Know any big bugs who would want something choice? Guess I know who could deliver the goods."

"So you're a portrait painter?"

"Not exactly yet, but it's on the horizon. Been here three years now and got to go back home next week. Thought I might do a few things on the way to show the old folks at home."

"Portraits?"

"You bet your life. Got plenty landscapes and noods—whatever will my old dad say to them noods?—and copies, gee, ain't I just *it* on Old Masters. Know that head by Van Dyck in the Louvre? I painted a sketch of it in oils in two hours. I tell you, when I took it home and looked at it, it was elegant—under a glass frame it would be worth a deal of money."

Of the women who came to the studio there was one who seemed born to be sketched. She had a pink-and-white, "I am such a simple little thing" sort of a face—pouting lips and rather retroussé nose, blue eyes, golden hair, olive green dress and hat to match. It was an "arty" sort of a hat, and a still more "arty" sort of a dress.

At that moment she drew the American's attention by lighting a cigarette.

"Holy Moses!" he said, "isn't that a peach! I guess she's out for blood. Tell me, old man, what kind of shirt-waist is that she's wearing?"

"Why don't you ask her yourself?" said George.

"Haven't the nerve. Say, is that the English fashion?"

"No, German, I think. They call them djibbas."

"Jibbers! Oh, my sacred aunt!"

He fairly doubled up with mirth, and all the rest of that afternoon burst at odd moments into suppressed explosions.

Cameron was his name—quite a good sort, but very naïve—the son of emigrants who had landed in America with ten dollars or so, and had "made good" somewhere

back in Iowa. Finding that George was not an Englishman but a Scot, Cameron fraternised, and persuaded him to come to the evening class also. Several men came there from Julian's, and the model was always good.

It seemed strange sometimes to George that he should be back at school, just as he was six years ago. But Paris is different from London, and the visitors at Colarossi's were artists whose judgments were worth having.

"*Pas mal*," they would say when they came to George's drawing, and so pass on. There were not many whom they let off easily.

Of the students themselves, an international crowd, the Americans appealed to him most. There was something virile about these men from the West which the European lacked. They were hope and self-confidence incarnate—sons of fathers who had pioneered maybe in Iowa or the Dakotas, or had fought their way to their dollars through the press of cities. Tense and high-strung, all of them, though some had the outward physique of cart-horses, they were so full of nerves that they seemed to think almost with their skins, as well as with their brains.

He had not heard much of American art, except of course of Sargent, but surely there must be a great art growing up there across the water, if these were the young men. Some day he must go across to America himself, and see the country that produced this eager spirit.

Their accent jarred at first, but ultimately fascinated. Instead of talking round the corner, their terse vigorous slang said what they meant to say straight out. So too their drawing was expressive and direct. They came to France for schooling, but France had just as much to learn from them as it could teach.

A delightful incident happened one day in a week when Valérien Pourgot came to criticise. The model was a little girl, very dainty, and an outrageous flirt.

The Professor came at eight o'clock, just as the second hour commenced.

Standing up on the platform, with her chin resting

simply on her hands, the little model played coquette with the great man as no model had ever dared before. Go where he would, those eyes were on him, smiling, entreating, defying. Colarossi's old atelier never held so many clever students as at this time, but every drawing seemed crude beside this sparkle and this life.

"C'est l'heure!"

It was the rest.

In a moment she was off the platform playing bo-peep in and out of the easels with the jolly big-bearded students, and always with one eye on the Professor. George saw that Pourgot too was fascinated by this fire-fly. And when she suddenly darted at him, flinging a kiss in his face, he positively blushed.

Some one tried to catch hold of her, but freedom came so easily. In a moment a hurricane of bread crumbs was flung at her would-be captor.

So far from being frightened, she grew more daring. Before any one could stop her she had suddenly turned round and put her arms round Pourgot's neck. A shout of laughter filled the room, and old Angelo, the everlasting factotum, of whom the inscription was written, *Tempus fugit, sed Angelo manet*, cautiously pushed his dirty grey beard through the door to see what was the matter.

However, the Professor took it in excellent part. Putting his hand gently round the little nude figure, he laid his lips tenderly on her forehead and kissed her.

"Gentlemen," he said, and a tear trickled down his cheek, "nothing in all the world is so pure and beautiful as youth."

This was on a Tuesday and Claire, the little model, was posing every evening throughout the week. As a rule the last evening of the week was an idle one, but Claire was too great an attraction to be missed, and when at last Saturday came round every one had a kiss for her, and a flower or bon-bons.

At ten o'clock every evening a patient figure had waited for her at the door. Mother Labori came without fail for

little Claire and every one saw that the child was in good hands. The square, honest face, pricked with smallpox, showed only tenderness and sympathy.

"Professor Pourgot wishes to see you to-morrow," said old Angelo to her on the last evening. "I think he wants your little Claire to pose for him at his studio."

Mother Labori glowed at the good news. Claire's fortune was made if Valérien Pourgot chose her for his pictures. No more posing in draughty schools for the child, but good, regular employment. She hugged the child as she wrapped her up against the night air.

In Paris, bachelor does not usually spell ascetic, but so it was with Valérien Pourgot. At the age of ten he used to be found in the Louvre copying drawings by the great Florentines. Since then he had been allowed to devote his whole time and soul to art. Tireless energy had given him an almost perfect knowledge of the figure and not till he began to paint did he find that something was wanting—some spark of warmth that should teach him the colour that makes beautiful the world. He had turned to the scientific painters of the light and was even classed with the pointelists by the scribes who could not understand his method and desired some term of abuse. Science, however, could only take him so far, and at heart Pourgot knew that he was just second-rate. The discovery might have disheartened a weaker man, but Pourgot persevered and, before many years, his application and knowledge of technique concealed his faults from all except the very few. From triumph to triumph he passed, till at last, great triumph of all, the State purchased one of his pictures for the Luxembourg. Still there were some who knew better. One of these was old Carolus Duran, who constantly urged his friend to go into the world and let Spring rule his life for a time.

Pourgot only smiled. Knowing as he did his weakness, he was still too self-satisfied to take the advice of another artist, especially on matters of conduct. His thin spare figure suffered no change to worldly comfort or indulgence.

The shoulders narrowed a little, and a little stooped. Wicked fingers had caricatured him as a point of interrogation, fingering thin shreds of beard before a well-fed Venus.

George liked him and he, on his part, seemed to like George's work. He always gave a friendly nod, and one day an appreciative pat on the back, whispering so that the others should not have reason to be jealous:

"Visit me some day at my studio."

"Thank you," said George, and resolved to go, but not yet for a while. He wished first to finish some of the canvases he had commenced. Then he would have something he could show.

CHAPTER XXX

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

PORTRAITURE was now forsworn, and yet the fascination of the human face was not so easily evaded. A compromise was found in the idea which had struck George as he entered the theatre on that memorable night—a portrait of himself. As he roughed in the structure of the head, seen in a mirror, he wondered that he had never done this before.

It was a lost opportunity. Portraiture had been his field, but he had overlooked the key to the gate he would unlock. He might have learned so much from his own looking-glass, knowing from constant self-analysis the feelings that must have found expression in those furrows.

The reason was not far to seek. With success grew small luxurious habits. His nervousness had increased, and the irritable skin had driven him to a barber, when in his sterner days he had shaved himself. Trifling as the cause might seem, it yet deprived him of many a chance for intimate reflection. He was a dandy, it is true, but his smartness came from instinct more than study. A photograph might have visualised the truth, but he had not faced the camera. So he might start in that London theatre entrance to find himself mistaken for a Jew.

How hard his face had grown! The nostrils might be sculptured, so firm was their dilation. His cheeks no longer flowed with the line he loved to mould in others. From the wide cheekbones they dropped sheer to the chin, a base itself that was hard and square in spite of its dimple. The line between the cheek and lip was already deeply cut, though he was only twenty-five—the left side more deeply than the right. This surely meant that sneering was habit-

ual—another revelation. The lips were fuller than he looked for, sensual he would have called them in another.

The lips so full and the dimpled chin recalled the portrait of Lord Byron in Albanian dress, painted by Thomas Phillips. The ears were as disconcerting as the lips. They might so easily be elongated for a satyr's head. Some critics indexed artists by the type of ear they painted. As if character did not shape cartilage! The old masters were truer to the model than the critics knew. It was the critics whose ears were all alike. Asses!

Yes, that sneer accounted for that furrow.

In the eyes he saw the artist. The ridge of eyebrows heavily overhung, and heavily the sockets shrunk beneath. The upper lids showed red, dropping over half the eyeball. That trick of seeing dimly so as to mass the light and shade had grown a habit. And how he must have worked! So dark was the skin beneath the lower lids that it seemed at times pure violet.

He must take more exercise, or live more in the country. That pallor and that hue meant sluggish circulation. Studio life in London was left well behind.

The note of dark-brown hair added its melancholy tone. Frankly a face that some might think forbidding. How was it that Ethel had chosen him for her smiles?

No wonder he had made few friends. And yet perhaps that aspect was created by his solitary life. Things were so complex, acting and reacting.

How curious his hands were! It was not till now he noticed that the third finger of each hand drooped a little, hidden by the others. People said that finger had most intimate connexion with the heart. The nails at least were straight and healthy.

He would paint the truth. No need to change a single note—all was in harmony, quiet and low in tone. No jewels to disturb the light, for he hated womanly adornment.

He was glad now that the lips were full. That rich red note made all the colour live. It was a man that he was

painting, not mere features. The eyes were hardest to suggest—that shadow was so mysterious. Who had ever yet painted amethyst?

The portrait might be easier if he began on canvas primed with grey, but why should he shirk its difficulties? He must create out of complete analysis, not fumble after truth.

He realised the lower jawbone now. Its firmness loomed through shadow.

Pacing in slow progression, the portrait so obsessed him that he could not escape its memory. Even in the tide of crowds, when self is pushed into a thousand eddies, he saw before him, sombre and yet alluring, that solitary face.

Paris filled him with astonishment. Here indeed was anarchy—life sandwiched between impulse and caprice, interludes of wildest dissipation after an avalanche of work. There were artists, better artists than himself, with eyes so sensitive to beauty, and hands so skilful, and brains so tireless. But how momentary the loves on which they squandered priceless talent!

Jean Defrain was the closest friend he made that winter. Jean showed him Paris the mysterious, the absurd. How pleasantly the ball passed when Jean introduced the demoiselles so anxious to find a rich English patron, as George with clothes like his must be! What fun to study Jean's amazement when the introductions led to no "affair!"

"A sponging little devil," George used to think, "but I suppose he is no worse than others."

This contact with such easy morals taught him how closely passion is akin to sin. At times of great temptation he could have killed as well as kissed. It was this other moral regimen that held him back from too light a love. Once let passion loose, and what might he not become? And what were not these already, these women who allured?

Insensibly all barricades crumbled before such amorous air. George's finer notions changed.

He knew the difference in himself, but cynically drifted. In that portrait of himself he made the lips a little fuller, a little more red. They were still in tone.

With yet more biting self-analysis he put himself in fancy with his present character through his past career. He would have worked as hard, but would he have lived as clean? Would his restraint have been so adamant in that carriage-drive with Ethel had not ambition stood between them? That ambition had proved so utterly empty, and she was very beautiful. Then, afterwards, in that room, alone?

Perhaps it was as well that Paris had come to him so late. Now the lines were set, and if love should come, it must be as an interlude, rather a harmony not changing the impetus of work.

CHAPTER XXXI

RETURN TO NATURE

THE bitterest discovery of exile was that London never missed him. Not a word from any of his brother artists came to George in Paris. How petty a success that he should drop out so unnoticed!

The letters he had sent telling of his departure had remained unanswered. He could not understand why one artist, whom he had himself once tided over a financial crisis, ignored a small commission he had asked him to fulfil. Of course! His resignation from the Portraitists was known in Chelsea. His influence was gone—but not his skill! His lips tightened as in the old days when he sat up all night copying those drawings of Andrea.

Damn them! He would spite them yet!

Still, friendship was not limited by letters. It was years since he had heard from Reid, but nobly that dear old fellow had answered to his cry.

No, his solitude was not yet absolute—thank Reid for that.

He had written to the general stating that domestic reasons compelled him to leave London for a while for Paris, and that he must therefore give up the opportunity of painting the Royal portrait. For a month or so there was no answer. Then, at last, somewhere about Christmas, the reply:—

“MY DEAR GRANGE,

“An excellent dinner at the club has just reminded me of that great night on which you entertained our portrait committee in your studio. Why the deuce did you run

away? Was it because of that she-devil, Lady Fitz-James? My God, what tales she told of you—she fairly terrified the Lord High Everything Else—said you swore at your sitters, and God knows what besides. I suppose it was the same old cat who spread that scandal that you had run away with another man's wife, and were being hunted round the continent by the outraged husband—some said she was an actress, others that she was a peer's daughter whom you had fascinated at your studio. My dear chap, I have defended you, but what could I say? 'Gone for domestic reasons to Paris'—just the confirmation they were looking for.

"I fear you must consider the portrait definitely 'off.'"

"By God, I wish I were as young as you are. No one would run away with me.

"Yours,

"R. HARRINGTON."

He got no credit for his virtue then.

Why should he not do what other men were doing?

Yet no! Rather let him forget the past in work.

So winter passed.

Then spring called up the flowers in the gardens of the Luxembourg, yes, and in George's heart as well. A winter of unremitting work had been left behind, and now he laved his tired eyes in the young green foliage and in the aconites, anemones and daffodils, which brought the children and the nursemaids and the proud young mothers again into the public gardens.

Yet parks were still walled in by streets, and in a little while he felt he must get out into a more edgeless atmosphere. So to his memory came the letters he had read from Millet to Sensier. At the Louvre he sighed before the aerial modelling of Rousseau's *Coucher de Soleil*. Near it was a picture of spring by Millet, with a path in it which seemed to beckon, beckon. He thought of Diaz, haunted by the *Mare aux Fées*.

So one day he took the train to Fontainebleau.

The apple was in blossom.

At Fontainebleau he spent the summer, from a cottage

in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec exploring quite as much as painting, tramping through the forest and over to Barbizon and Chailli and Grez and Marlotte. Such painting as he did that summer was mostly in the park of the Château. For there a little dreaming and a little twilight were all he needed for his settings of Endymion.

Next year he would come again and paint from dawn to dusk. But this summer he would just drench himself in all the beauty of the forest.

Such people as he met condemned him as morose. As the summer heightened, the colonies of artists in the forest centres grew more populous, and he might easily have found some transient friendships. But for once he was in the mood to be alone. He had begun to see that art had a deeper claim upon him than he had yet allowed. How little room for the soul had there been in the life he led in London, "cadging"—yes, that was the word for it—for Society portraits. Here, under that vast sky, in this simple elemental life of forest and of peasant and of plain, another spirit seemed to grow on him. If thunder-clouds rolled up and storms swept down upon the forest, he would go out on to some rocky height and let the rain beat on his face, thrilling at every flash of lightning. Or, when the blaze of July filled the air with hum of insects, one found him in the heather, bathing and half burning in the sunshine.

George understood now that technique was not the chief thing in great work. Sincerity was soul of all, sincerity and the passion to express oneself. Millet, the peasant, created a revolution in art as great as that which flung the nobles out of France. Millet fought the fight not with palette tricks, but with most passionate sincerity.

If George read anything except his beloved Keats, it was some letter of Jean François—sentences like these, thrilling just as those lightning flashes:

"Voyez ces choses qui remuent là-bas dans une ombre; elles rampent et marchent—ce sont les génies de la plaine.

Ce ne sont pourtant que de pauvres gens. C'est une femme toute courbée sans doute, qui rapporte sa charge d'herbe, c'est une autre qui se traîne épuisée sous son fagot de bois. De loin, elles sont superbes, elles balancent leurs épaules sous la fatigue, le crépuscule en dévore les formes; c'est beau, c'est grand comme un mystère."

Life assumed a new perspective. Paris indeed already had done much to assuage the bitterness of broken hopes. Every face, every street, every voice, every moment had its new distractions. Our petty tempers are so much the creatures of environment.

The old ambition was a dead thing now. It meant so much a year ago to think he was commissioned for a Royal portrait. To-day his only ardour was to be in sympathy with nature. What were tailored kings compared to the majesty of these great wind-swept spaces.

And Ethel, poor unfortunate! Had she gone under? If ever he had thought of her with rancour, no longer now.

CHAPTER XXXII

CLAIRE

MAESTRO, Maestro!"

"Claire, Claire!"

"Come and see me in my new hat."

"Come and show me your new hat."

"I'm too busy putting it on."

"I'm too busy painting."

"Very well. Good-bye for ever!"

"Coming, coming—just half a minute."

Valérien Pourgot was Maestro, but little Claire, his model, was the real master, and Claire knew it. If Pourgot had not lost his heart, his head and his hands a thousand times over to this ten year old, he would have thought her a tyrant or at least a nuisance. He had more or less adopted her, taking Mother Labori as his housekeeper and getting an old out-of-work called Blanchon to be her tutor. In the mornings he would paint Claire. In the afternoons he was dancing attendance—at the shops, at the races, at the circus, in fact all over Paris. Her tastes were fortunately simple, otherwise Pourgot's purse would soon have been empty. Claire collected picture post cards, and these often ran away with twenty francs in an afternoon, but he never protested, thinking that she was in a way cultivating her artistic sense, and thus binding her tastes to his.

She was passionately fond of horses and dragged him once a week to the circus—a willing victim, for he too liked the colour and movement of the ring. He made continual sketches and taught Claire to do the same. The child was very clever, and Pourgot often thought that instinct had given her clearer vision than all his prodigies of work.

He was Maestro to her; and, though she led him a dog's life, she loved the dog. After all, he was so happy in her company that conscience never pricked him. Three years ago he would have died of shame if he had not worked all day. Now he was beginning to find out that he was man as well as artist.

"Where are we going to-day?" said Pourgot, buttoning his boots.

"I shan't tell you till you say my hat is the most beautiful thing in the world."

"I shall never say that."

"Oh, Maestro!"

"Because there is nothing so beautiful to me as Claire herself."

"Aha! Aha! Aha!—oh, Maestro!"

"Yes?"

"Are devils ugly?"

"Of course."

"Even the little ones?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur Blanchon called me a little devil to-day at my grammar lesson."

"Naughty again?"

"I only threw my book at his head."

"But, Claire, you must not do that."

"He is no artist. He is afraid of dogs; he speaks like a dictionary; he wears his spectacles all crooked; he doesn't cut his nails; he didn't notice my new dress; he sneers at picture post cards—and he called me a little devil. I hate him. I won't learn grammar. I won't spell. I won't write like a lady. I won't behave properly. I won't! I won't! I won't!"

"Poor old Blanchon, he hasn't got any one like little Claire to look after him, as I have," said Pourgot.

Now she was all remorse.

"I'll tell you what, Maestro. I'll write to tell him I'm sorry, and we'll buy him a box of chocolates for to-morrow."

"Splendid! But can you write a letter all by yourself?"

"Yes," said Claire with two dimples, "when I'm good."

So the letter was written, and at the first bon-bon shop they made their purchase. Long experience had taught Claire which kind of box contained the largest quantity for the smallest price.

Then on to the circus.

There was a new clown, called Balaam. Claire shrieked with laughter.

"I'd like to live with him all my life," she said.

"And leave me?"

"No, no, he'd be my husband, and you would come and live with us and paint me laughing."

"But he's married already and has seven children."

"Oh, Maestro, do you know him?"

"Yes, he is a model when he is out of work."

"Out of work?" Her eyes were big round O's. "Is he ever out of work? Does he laugh then? Can a model ever be funny? Does he pose well? Have you seen his wife and seven children? Do——"

"One at a time, please," said Pourgot, putting his fingers in his ears. "I'll take you behind the scenes and introduce you to him after the performance is over."

"Oh, how lovely!" And all through the performance she kept saying, "Will it be done soon?"

At last Balaam had done with his fooling and ran out holding on to the tail of his Ass. Pourgot tipped an attendant to take his card behind, and in a minute they were summoned.

They went through a sort of stable, Claire in an ecstasy at being close to real circus horses. Ahead of them they heard the sound of a whip cracking and a voice shouting and swearing.

"What is it?" she said.

"Nothing," replied the attendant. "Only Balaam thrashing his donkey."

"You vicious son-of-the-gutter, take that, curse you! and that! You would kick me, would you?" And a whip slashed the poor animal's sides. The clown was in a brutal rage.

"Maestro," cried Claire. "How cruel!"

Then slipping from him, she caught hold of the clown's coat, pulling him away and calling:

"Brute, brute! Oh, the poor donkey!"

"Get back, you little devil," said the clown roughly, "or I'll whip you too."

Pourgot leaped upon him.

"Schneider," he said, calling him by his real name, "this is a matter for the police."

The model recognised the painter and cringed for pardon.

"I meant no harm," he said. "It was only that obstinate devil of a donkey. I beg the little lady's pardon. I thought she was one of ourselves."

By this time a crowd had gathered round. The others were delighted to see the new clown taken down a peg.

Pourgot's anger vanished as rapidly as it had come.

"Come away," he said to Claire, ignoring the frightened Schneider. "This is no place for you."

So they hurried out, Claire sobbing as she remembered Balaam's ass.

On the way home she hardly spoke. How was it possible that the clown who made every one laugh so much could be so cruel?

Pourgot heard her sighing and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Would you like to marry Balaam now?"

"Never! Never! I will always stay with you."

It was a child that spoke and yet what happiness her answer gave him. She was becoming a part of his existence. She must be model, or in the room, or within call. She was so fond of him, too. She would tyrannise over him sometimes, furious if he was slow to obey her—but what else could one expect of such a child?

"Maestro! A new series! Look!"

In a moment all thought of the clown and donkey had vanished. Claire was dashing after new picture post cards.

"Aren't they lovely!" she cried. "Look at that violet and orange. I must have them, I must. Quick, quick, or some one else will have them."

Before he left the shop, Maestro had seen the last of thirty francs, all for the collection. No, for more. Had not happiness come back into the young face? Why should she be sad?

After the post cards, coffee and iced cakes at the pasty-cook's and then some photos, and then a yard of apple-green ribbon, and then a Japanese kimono, and then—

"No more money," said Pourgot. "We must go home."

"On the top of a bus, then," said Claire.

On the top of a bus they went, scattering the streets with their white horses.

Claire was too tired for dinner. She just told Pourgot to get some *bouillon*, and tucked herself to bed. By the time the *bouillon* was ready, Ten-year-old was fast asleep, so fast that she never felt the kiss pressed so tenderly on her forehead.

"Will she ever understand?" he said to himself, as he sat by her cot, watching her slow and rhythmic breathing. "Yes, she has so good a heart."

As he rose to leave the room his eye fell on the box of chocolates they had bought for Blanchon. It had fallen on the floor.

"So good a heart," he repeated with a smile.

As he lifted the box he started. It certainly was the same box.

He opened it. It was empty.

The little minx had eaten them all herself.

Pourgot smiled more ruefully.

"After all," he thought, "she is only a child."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MOTHS

IT was Claire who opened the studio door to him in the Rue d'Assas when George at last made up his mind to call on Valérien Pourgot. He remembered the little model—who could forget her? Whether she remembered him or not, she smiled at him—flirt!

George had come back from Fontainebleau to Paris rather early. Colarossi's was almost empty. Yet the absence of the crowd had this advantage that when Pourgot made his visit, he did not pass by so quickly, indeed renewed the invitation.

"You have been painting during the summer, *n'est-ce pas?* Bring me some of your sketches. If you paint as well as you draw, they should be interesting."

And so he went.

Who of us is proof against such flattery?

Pourgot had a studio big enough to paint a battle-picture.

"I like a large room to work in," he explained. "It has more light. I bathe my eyes in the light."

Claire, the little model, seemed to have kept him busy. The walls were gay with studies of her dainty figure.

Pourgot was a consummate draughtsman, but his colour?—the colour of a man who draws things, does not see them first in colour.

"Ah, you have brought me some of your paintings. Let me unroll them for you. Ah! So! Ver-y interesting, but beautiful—so true—so direct. A little inexperience in selection, but that will come. You are English? No, Scotch, I thought so—your work is so serious. You have the sad heart, you Scotch, you see through a mist of tears.

These are from the Forest of Fontainebleau, and the Park of the Château—my native region. Beautiful, but how sad, and you are so young too. Why do you not surround yourself with bright things—paint with more gaiety?”

He flung a gesture at the walls, all alive with Claire.

“Let old age bring its tears with it—all too soon. You are young, *mon cher*. Paint with more youth.”

George smiled at his enthusiasm.

“I would if I could,” he said, “but I am still only a beginner and a stranger here. It is easier for me to paint these long lingering twilights so full of dew than to paint your brilliant express-speed effects of sunlight, as you have them here in France. *Cher maître*”—he knew the title pleased the Frenchman—“give me more time.”

Morose and ascetic might be his face, sad might be his pictures; but, as the flame of Paris warmed him, George’s heart too burned to know the intimate joys of life. He was young, he was a man, the world was full of siren faces and alluring mysteries. Certain cafés on the boulevards, perhaps more brightly lit than others, beckoned him.

He sat irresolute, amid the fluttering of moths, so fair, so frail.

Why should he not do as other men were doing?

What held him back most of all was fear—dread of that shadow of disease lurking behind the light. He remembered a young American, full of vigour and high spirits, plunging at once into this passionate gay life—a little later white in the face and irritable at the chaffing of his comrades, then dead with his own hand.

He had been “unlucky,” said the comrades. But was this merely isolated luck, or what was the meaning of the army of physicians who lived upon the cure of strange diseases?

There was too much of the unknown about these pleasures for this canny Scot. Into what den might he not be lured? How could he bargain about such a thing as love? What might be his ultimate regret? The step once taken could never be retraced.

He was a foreigner. If, now, one of these light-o'-loves were English it might be easier.

If any of these women spoke to him—and they were not shy—he would pretend to take no notice. If they persevered, he left the café, for another of the same. They might be moths fluttering round the lamp. Very nearly so was he.

Once he did come across a London girl. It was in a low-class *cabaret* on the *quais*, where he had walked in out of curiosity.

The performers came down into the audience, handing round the hat and asking the men for drinks.

George was at the back of the hall when this girl, a dancer, came up to him. The waiter hovered round.

“Beer?”

George nodded.

“English, ain’t you?”

He nodded again.

“Get me out of here,” she whispered, “there’s a friend. They’ve stolen my money. I want my fare back to London.” Then as the waiter bustled up, “Buy me a cigarette.”

There was entreaty in her face. She had, no doubt, to get business for the house.

George nodded again, and as the waiter went away to fetch the order:

“What’s wrong?” he said.

“Give me the money, quick.” She coughed every time she spoke. She had peroxide hair, and a skin rotten with powder. It must have been a long time back since she was first betrayed.

They charged him five francs for the cigarettes. George demurred, but the waiter insisted.

“Pay it and clear out,” whispered the girl, as she bent over her glass. “Better that than be knifed.”

The hall was only half full. It was quite possible. George paid, and the waiter no longer stood between him and the door.

“What sort of a place is this?” he asked nervously.

"White slavers," she replied. "Can't you help me out?"

He was a green, soft-hearted fool, and he knew she knew it.

"I've just got forty francs."

"That will do. Put them in the cigarette box, and give me the box."

Her turn came on again, and as she left him he slipped out. Whew!

It was a week before he had regained his nerve.

After that he kept to the more public places.

Yes, as Cameron had said, this was a "hell of a burg."

But George was young, and was a man. Nature was insistent. These bright lights beckoned to him, and he sat, still irresolute, amid the fluttering of moths, so fair, so frail.

It was difficult to breathe in Paris after the country air.

George's studio was always a marvel to Jean Defrain, Parisian paint-slinger. Here there was an ante-room with a comfortable and well-lined bed, not a shelf on the wall to which one climbed by a ladder. Here too the walls were papered not with startling nudes but with Braun's photographs of Old Masters, framed in dark oak, and giving the grey studio an almost sombre note. Here too there was a place for everything. One did not have to put away the frying pan in the same drawer as the under-linen.

"You English are all hypocrites, oh, shocking!" said Jean one evening.

"I meet a young miss," he continued, swinging his cane, "that is to say very nearly young, with a face for Mater Dolorosa, so heavenly, and I carry my heart in my new boots for two days, till I find she dances the *cancan* higher than the Sacré-Coeur. Oh, my dear friend, you know that pretty Russian whose friendship I made by knocking over her easel when she was copying at the Louvre? Well, this English Miss is prettier even than she—stunning! Come with me and make her acquaintance. She would make such a good friend for you. We have been asleep, we two. She has been in Paris nearly a year, and she—oh, shocking!"

"Probably an American," said George. "You Frenchmen never know the difference."

"No, I tell you. English of the true blue. Do you think I have been in your foggy London for two year and not discover that your English miss talks with her beautiful lips and not with her beautiful nose? Besides, I have asked her, and she has told me, turning up her beautiful eyes like the St. Catherine in your National Gallery. Her name is Ettèle."

"Ettèle? That's not an English name. Oh, I see, Ethel—Ethel what?"

"But my dear friend, be careful. You upset the ink."

"Tell me her name. Quick, or I'll wring your neck."

"Ettèle—Ettèle—I have forgotten, I can only remember that rose her face, and her lily throat—ah, yes, Ettèle Swallow, that's it. She comes to the Café Harcourt to-night, and after that we go to the Bullier. You will come too?"

"Yes," said George, "I shall come."

It seemed ages now since he had left London, and that episode was almost buried. Not a word had come from Jacobs & Jacobs, the solicitors, and as he saw no English paper, he never knew how the divorce case had turned out. The decree must have gone against her, and she had come to Paris—and—

Well, poor fool! And so too was he a fool to go near her, but what did anything matter now? If this were her tragedy, he must see the last act. That might be some consolation for the misery she had once caused him.

She had played with fire, and been badly burnt. Grimly he remembered the epitaph that Henry Ward Beecher proposed to write on the tomb of the atheist Robert Ingersoll, an epitaph of two words—"Robert Burns." Well, he was not going to set himself up as her judge. She was what God had made her.

"Wait a moment," he said, turning to his sketch-books.

He never destroyed a drawing, believing that the earliest might still prove useful, if only to show his progress. As he looked for his Langham drawing of Ethel, he found the

Servite Manual which she had given him when he met her outside that Catholic Church in the Fulham Road.

"Hurry up!" said Jean. "She said nine o'clock."

"Ready," replied George, slipping the Manual into his pocket.

The restaurant was full, but they could not see her anywhere.

"I'll stay here at this table," said George. "You look round for her."

Jean left his wine unwillingly.

George was curiously calm. He knew what he was going to do, and did not care what happened.

At the next table was a little old man who was spinning out his pleasure. It was a delight to listen to the chuckle of the old fellow as each dish was brought before him. Out came his tongue, and he cocked his head to one side. Over the succulent pork his eyebrows lifted, as if to say, "Ah, little pig, you were once a happy little pig, and now you are going to make me happy. It is the law of change and the change is for the better." Then he brushed his white moustache well away from his mouth, and fell to with enthusiasm. At the end he sighed with satisfaction, and twirled his thumbs for the next course.

Presently Jean returned.

Ethel, he said, would be with them in a minute.

"She is a Rubens to-night," said Jean ecstatically.

There she was.

Across the room their eyes had met.

She was sucked towards him.

How beautiful she still was—"fair as the first that fell of womankind"—and yet his soul recoiled from her.

"You!" she cried. "I did not know——"

"I wanted to give you something," said George in a voice that he hardly recognised. "Something that you once lent me."

He had risen as she came up. He handed her the Manual.

Ethel sank into a seat at their table.

"Of course," she said huskily. "Of course!"

Jean turned from one to the other in surprise.

"Ah," said he, "Mater Dolorosa again! Au revoir, my friends. I came here for some fun."

Off he went, gesticulating and muttering to himself, "Hypocrites, hypocrites!"

"You know what I am now," she said when they were alone. "Why do you remind me of this?"

"I wanted to make certain."

"Make certain of what? That I am—you know what?"

"Yes," said George brutally. "You were always rotten. First you married for money, then you were merely luxurious, then it was lust."

"Don't!" she cried. "You are more cruel than Wolseley."

"You ruined my career."

"Leave me, or take me out of this. I shall scream."

She was pale as death.

"Come," he said.

Outside, he gripped her by the wrist. It was raining, but neither of them noticed. Rain washed bare the empty streets. Round the corner dripped the cloak of a gendarme. A little plump face pressed its nose against the window opposite, wondering where all the water came from. One draggled cur snarled at the world because it was washed so clean.

At the Seine George and Ethel found themselves again.

"That is the place for you," said George, jerking at the rush of waters.

"No, no! Not yet! I am afraid! It is all because I have been so lonely."

"Lonely!"

Just a little word, but it was enough.

He understood in a flash.

"Why," he said, catching his breath, "so am I too."

She was shivering and crying.

"Come," he said, leaning on the parapet, "let's talk it over."

She could not look at him, but she knew their souls were face to face. She could not speak at first, but on the parapet traced with her finger a hundred times the figure 8.

"So you have been lonely," he said, to help her. "I never thought of that. I think I can understand now."

"Ah," she sighed, her heart rushing out, "if people only knew! But so many have happy homes, so how can they believe? I was always so miserable, and wanted to be free. I thought there was a chance, but Wolseley made a slave of me, worse than I was before. But still I could not be alone, alone with myself—I was afraid—and I did anything for Wolseley, lest he should leave me. And you, yes, you—I had never met any one like you, who said things out straight—and then I messed it all, and you hated me more than ever. So I lost you too. Wolseley had spent everything, and was trying to get rid of me."

"Go on," he said.

"There is nothing more. I have always been alone. But I did not want to ruin any more lives than my own. It was through not thinking that I spoilt yours. When I understood, it made me reckless, and then I went to the bad. Oh, it is too late now!"

She began to sob again.

"Come now," said George, putting his hand on her arm.

Strange sympathy! Here was one to whom he might have been attuned, had not they missed each other. She had sinned from an empty heart, like his. Sin was akin to passion, passion to sin. At last, at last he understood. She was what God had made her.

"I wonder if——" he said, after a silence.

"Yes? If what?"

"If it is too late."

He hardly knew why he said it, but she was thrilled by sudden hope. In that storm of emotions, fear, hate, despair and love were now in the sough, now high on crest.

She looked up in his face.

"Tell me about the divorce case," he said. "I never heard how it ended."

"It never ended," letting her face fall again. "Of course there were two sides to the question, and my solicitors found out about him too. That's where all the money had gone to. *He* called it his theatre. *They* called it his seraglio. Then for some reason or other Jacobs & Jacobs, his solicitors, threw up the case. I was ruined by that time, with law expenses and everything. I had no money left, and no real friends. So I came to Paris. I thought I could lose myself here. I had not a cent, but—well, I was still pretty."

His face was in shadow.

"Of course I am still his legal wife, but what a mockery! And you—you have never married?"

In the ghastly schooling of the last year, she had learned the tricks of seduction, and one might have said that that was why she looked up in his face as she touched him. Perhaps. But there may have been something more. The drowning do not calculate on attitudes when they clutch at straws.

"No," he said, almost with a sigh.

"You mean you are really lonely too."

His lips tightened. She was afraid. Had she gone too far?

"What are you thinking of?" she said.

"I was thinking," he answered very slowly, "that it is raining."

Then he laughed.

After all he was not utterly offended. She laughed too. "So it is," she said. "I must go home."

"I will go with you. Where do you live?"

"Rue Napoléon."

They walked along in silence, till they reached the door. There they hesitated. Then George spoke.

"I am an artist still," he said. "Would you care to be a model again?"

"It's my only chance."

"Then come to me to-morrow morning. Here is my address. Seven o'clock sharp."

CHAPTER XXXIV

RAPPROCHEMENT

AT first they both felt awkward in each other's presence. Then the simple fact of work smoothed down the angles. How exquisite she was in figure! George knew that if he searched through Paris he could not find a lovelier. That made it easier to forget the ugly past.

She liked to talk, and he was not averse to listening. Instinctively they kept as far as possible off the story of her life. At the same time she could not quite obliterate all record of herself—what woman could? She nevertheless took care to avoid all mention of her husband.

George was anxious for a safe and common subject of conversation, and thought at last he found it in Ethel's passion for romance. At the end of the morning, she asked if she might see his pictures—he had just been sketching her. The canvases against the wall were turned for her inspection, some almost finished, others cruder.

"Why!" she said. "They're nearly all from Keats. Isn't that *Hyperion* and that *St. Agnes Eve*?"

"Yes. Do you know him so well as that?"

"Do I know him? Why, all by heart. Let's see, that's where *Hyperion*,

'Like to a diver in the pearly seas,
Forward he stooped over the airy shore
And plunged all noiseless into the deep night.'

I thought you were an art-for-art's-sake kind of painter. I didn't know you took a literary theme."

George was astonished. It took him some time to grasp

that the world had not stood still while he made progress. But what did she know about these things? Who had taught her? Ah, perhaps he had better not inquire.

"I didn't know of your taste for literature," he said.

"It wasn't always so," she said, flushing. "It was afterwards that I found how lovely poetry could be. Oh, I know when I was a girl I read most frightful trash. But afterwards when I had money I took elocution lessons, and it was then I began to understand."

"Did you ever act?"

"No, my master said I wasn't good enough. I could recite poetry, not act it—I had no sense of drama or passion, he said. I think he was prejudiced, being a professional and knowing I had money. If I had got a part, I should have cut out some girl who needed it more. He was a good sort, old Danby."

"You must recite to me."

"Oh, I have forgotten such a lot."

"Do you remember this?" he said, pointing to a romantic landscape. "That's Keats too."

"Is it? Oh yes, the *Ode to Psyche*:

' . . . Two fair creatures, couchéd side by side
In deepest grass, beneath the whispering roof
Of leaves and trembléd blossoms, where there ran
A brooklet, scarce espied:

'Mid hushed, cool-rootéd flowers, fragrant-eyed,
Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
They lay calm breathing on the budded grass;
Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
Their lips touched not, but had not bade adieu.'

Oh I forget the rest."

"You remember more than most people would. That ode is not so popular as the others."

"Yes, but it has got my favourite lines—you know the end,

'And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,

A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!" "

In spite of himself he was thrilled by her voice—she put such fire into the words. The ground was getting dangerous.

"This is a real landscape," he said. "I spent last summer in the Forest of Fontainebleau, and happened on a place like this. I chose the place for itself, and it is was only when I was half-way through that I came across this ode. There was an old chap, Reid, an artist, who used to tell me to read Keats in the open air. So I did. The place might have been made for this description."

"How curious!"

"I think a literary theme is justified," he went on, "if the interest is really in the colour, not in the reference to the words. A painter has to paint under some emotion, if he is fit for anything. Some can get an inspiration from a chance arrangement of light in a particular place at a particular time. I can do that too, as in the case of this landscape—at least at first, but somehow I am touched most easily by poetry. That gets to the heart, and brings the colour to my eyes."

"Perhaps it's the same reason too why I love Keats," she said. "I used once to care only for love stories of dukes and earls. Then when I grew older, I saw the silliness of it all. But I couldn't live without romance—*St. Agnes Eve* and the *Pot of Basil*, why, I used to revel in them."

"Do you know Rossetti?" said George.

"Some of him. But he's harder. But I understand Jenny."

Dangerous ground again.

He shifted the conversation back to pictures. Yet he had been glad to find that she was not merely animal. It would be easier to get on with her now.

As he replaced the pictures, she noticed that one was still unturned.

"What is that one?" she asked. "May I see?"

"If you like. It's only a portrait of myself."

As he placed it on the easel,

"Oh!" she cried, and "Oh!"

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Are you really so hard as that? Why, that makes me think of granite—you do come from Aberdeen, don't you? It frightens me."

"But is it like?"

"Yes," she said. "It is like."

"I used to be considered good at portraits," he said.

She looked at him timorously to see if he meant this as blame to her—she who had lost him the chance of painting the King's portrait—but there was no bitterness on his face. So he no longer grudged the loss of his ambition now! That was one barrier the less between them.

"I go to the Louvre this afternoon," he said, taking the canvas down. "Would you like to come?"

"I should love to!"

As he fell into step with her, he suddenly realized how great must be the change in himself, that he could do such a thing as this. Here was the woman whom he had so utterly loathed, the cast-off wife of a man who would not stop at murder, who had by her folly or wickedness tossed him from the position he had won after so many years' hard work, now walking with him as a friend. What would Reid say? "Keep clear of women, if ye can," the words rang in his ears. "If ye can't, make the best of them. Fit them into yer work, don't let the work fit them." That after all was what he was doing, fitting her to his work. And yet it was a risky game. He had singed his wings once already at that candle.

A fierce suspicion came over him. Perhaps she had come to Paris in the hope of snaring him again.

"Why did you come here at all," he asked sharply.

"Why does one do anything?" she answered. "Instinct, I suppose, and then I knew I could do what I wanted here. But most of all—surely you remember the story I told

you of my lost baby, well, she is here. It may seem strange to you to think that I with all the life I have been leading can still think of her. But men don't understand what a woman is who has been a mother. They think of love simply as a brief pleasure, but to a woman it may mean months of waiting, of fear and of pain till a little new life is born. She may have hated the thought of its coming—but when it does come, her very soul seems to be in it. She holds the mite to her breast, and till it is weaned they are still almost part of one and the same life. It was hard, hard poverty and a cruel husband that parted me from my baby—God knows how I ever came to do it—so when the worst came to the worst and I knew I must go under, I still wished to see the little one again, if only for a moment.

“No!” she continued, divining his thought, “it was not you that I was following though I am glad I met you—it was not you.”

“As for your husband?”

“If I met him again, I think I could kill him,” she cried passionately.

Then, overwhelming every petty thought of self, came the vision of the Victory of Samothrace, magnificently set at the head of the Louvre staircase.

“My God!” he said, catching her by the arm and pointing to the statue. “Isn't it glorious?”

CHAPTER XXXV

RECOGNITION

I SHOULD like to go to the Salon," said Ethel, a few days after she had become George's model. "I want to see that picture of yours even though it is cellar'd, as you call it."

George had had good fortune with the first picture he had done on the new lines, even though it was badly hung. He had sold it, much to his surprise, for the Salon as a rule brings more glory than profit. A Jew had bought it for 1,000 francs. It was not a great picture, though full of atmosphere and charm and colour—just a little shepherd boy, his soul bursting out on a penny whistle.

George had not seen Jean Defrain since the evening of the reconciliation, and was more and more nervous about going in public with Ethel, especially to places where he might meet the inquisitive. Still he was in a mood to humour her, even at the cost of personal inconvenience. So he put aside his brushes and they went.

They met no acquaintances, naturally enough, as the doors were just opened and they were the first arrivals. Ethel's tastes and his own proved much akin. It may be that she was quick enough to see what he wanted her to like. Anyhow, they were two doves in spring. She did not say that any picture was "pretty." It was always "beautiful" or "in tone" or "harmonious."

George knew the work of so many artists that he hardly needed a catalogue.

They went round quietly, discussing his favourites. In time they came to one by Valérien Pourgot.

"Isn't it stunning?"

The picture showed the figure of a little girl, nude, laugh-

ing at her reflection in a mirror—perfectly drawn, charming in colour.

Ethel said nothing, and when George looked at her he saw that she was pale.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing—let’s go on.”

But as they moved away she stopped and held his arm.

“Let me see that picture again,” she said. “I have a foreboding. Do you remember the photograph I sent you once from Paris? Don’t you see the likeness to this little girl? She, my baby, would just have been about this age. This is the image of what I once was. Is this Valérien Pourgot really a good artist?”

“A perfect draughtsman,” said George. “I remember the model too. She posed one week at Colarossi’s, a delightful little thing. She was called Claire.”

“Claire! That was the name I gave my baby. And the woman knew.”

George remembered Mother Labori and described her.

“It is she!”

Ethel was quite overcome with emotion and could not speak coherently till they had got back to the studio.

“Don’t think I am only acting a part,” she said when she had become more collected. “I know I’ve been a bad lot, worse perhaps than you think. But I have had my punishment in this separation from my baby, knowing that I could never have another. It’s all too horrible now. Poor little thing! Is this Monsieur Pourgot a good man? A model in Paris runs such risks—it’s far worse than London. Oh, that awful text in the Bible runs in my head, ‘The sins of the father are visited on the children.’ Can you find out something about her? When I gave her up I had to swear that I would never come near the child again. But it would be different if you found out for me. I just want to know if she is happy.”

George promised to do his best. After a few days he found that Claire had been practically adopted by Pourgot and that Mother Labori was acting as his housekeeper.

Next day, Mother Labori came to Pourgot with a letter in her hand. It was in a woman's handwriting, blurred as if with tears.

"Why have you done this thing?" it ran. "Why did I trust you? Why did you not write to me, if you wanted money? I would have sent her anything to save her from this life. I saw the picture in the Salon, and I knew it was my little Claire, so sweet, so pure, so innocent—as yet. For the love of Mary, keep her pure. I hear that Monsieur Pourgot is a good man. Don't let him let her go. Keep her from temptation."

"Explain," said Pourgot sharply.

"I had almost begun to think her my own child, monsieur. I loved her so—and she is so fond of me."

"Then Claire is not your own child?"

"I adopted her as a little baby and I have nourished her as my own."

"And this letter? It is not signed."

"It must be from her mother. But she swore when I consented to take little Claire that she would never try to see the child again. I would not take her unless."

"Claire does not know?"

"She believes me to be her mother," said the woman, weeping. "I have been a good mother to her, poor though I am—and I would not send to the lady for money. I am sure I know how it is earned. She is a bad woman."

"Yes," said Pourgot thoughtfully. "You did right. Yet this mother seems still to love our little Claire."

"She deserted Claire. I have not deserted her."

"This letter is stained with tears."

"Claire's life has been bright with happiness. Perhaps that too might have been stained with tears had she lived with such a mother."

"You are right," said Pourgot. "We must keep the child to ourselves. Never let that mother break her oath. Claire is yours—yours—ours."

CHAPTER XXXVI

PASSION-FLOWERS

ETHEL was a flower that could adapt itself to any soil. The coarseness that her life must have taught her never betrayed itself, simply because she had an intuition that George would show her into the street if she were anything but clean. It was the imitative instinct. She was no longer the Ethel whom he had trampled on because of her importunity. Then she had felt confidence in herself and was conscious of her attractions. Now her forwardness was in full rout. Her spirit crouched, half in fear of his reproach, half in remorse. So on the first day she covered the traces of her disreputable year; then the renewed delight in poetry and romance, and the refining memory of Claire made the recoil more natural still.

She was meshed in nerves. A ring at the door shook her as if it were the Last Trump.

Had he been the model and she the artist, she would have drawn his portrait. But he, being artist, did not draw hers. She baffled him too much, so of her face he made only an incident in her figure.

"What is to be the business footing?" he had asked her.

"I can live on thirty francs a week," she said.

So it was arranged that she should sit to him every morning for that sum, and that she could spend the rest of the day as she pleased, while he continued in his old routine. He offered to make it more, but she was then in a passion for self-denial, and it was not till later that she regretted her impetuosity.

"Remember," he said, "if ever you are worried by your old acquaintances, say you are with me."

That was generous of him, but she sometimes wished his generosity took more material shape in an increase of allowance.

Their life in a way recalled the weeks he had spent in the company of Miss Marriott before she went out to rejoin Ravin in America. In that case there had been the other bond of music. Now there was the fetter intellectual. Education had entered late into Ethel's life, but when it did come it found a royal hospitality. During her years of plenty, she could buy what books she coveted, and though poverty is no bar to a delight in poetry and the ready purse is too often responsive only to a rare edition, Ethel had used hers to buy unlimited companionship in books.

This companionship George had for some time almost forsworn. But until he was seventeen it had been the main-spring of his life. How sweet and cunning a key was this that wound it up again. The sicknesses that most defy the doctor are those which are suppressed, and the suppression from which George had always suffered was an intellectual snobbery. When Ravin's wife had written him an ill-spelt letter, she became a mere acquaintance. When Ethel rhymed with Richard Crashaw and flowered with Sir Philip Sidney she entered the inner comradeship. Danger, George, breakers ahead!

George indeed gradually realized that he was in the position of the little boy who is credited with the apples he had never stolen. If stolen apples in such a case are sweet, how much sweeter are the unstolen! Why not merit the sneers of Jean Defrain, now that they were so inevitable? To protest was but to earn greater ridicule. He would be called simpleton as well as hypocrite. Not that he really cared, but he shrank before the formidable battery of Jean's tongue. He wished now that he had never let the Frenchman grow so intimate. George heard him sniggering at Colarossi's and knew that he himself must be the joke. That Spaniard in the corner was drawing his caricature.

None the less he determined to let Ethel have her chance. He knew that she was beautiful, but he was far from loving

her. Now that he saw her every day, he noticed things that jarred. She wore earrings, and sometimes a faint tinge of powder, little intimate things that he had not the right or the courage to speak about. Yet he came to like her in a way. She never tried to be anything but a model. It was her only chance, she had said, and so far she was trying to take it. He had been touched, too, by her evident love for the lost child.

Ethel herself was curiously nervous. She still posed well, but at the end of her sittings she was sometimes faint, or burst into hysterical tears. This was due partly to the wild life she had been leading. The physical strain that the artist exacted was no longer so easy to endure. Partly too she was kept at tension by the remembrance of her child. She excused herself once a week for an hour in order to attend early mass, and many indications pointed to religion. This was a mood to be encouraged. Little as George believed in Christianity, he knew how strong might be its moral impetus. Perhaps she might take the veil. That was perhaps the best solution. Perhaps this was but a passing influence. Could she forgo for ever the pleasures that she once had tasted, and that her beauty might so easily recall?

Yet she seemed different from the French girls who formed the complement, in a Bohemian world, to men like Jean Defrain. Hers had been the push of circumstance, not the impetus of warm blood. She had broken with convention. They seemed never to have known convention. She had before her heaven or hell. They might enjoy their youthful fling, and earn husbands with their savings.

It was the utter unmorality of these demoiselles that had kept George untouched by easy blandishments. He could understand the sinner. The pagan was of a world he loathed.

Had Ethel not still been beautiful, he might have tired of his good nature and left her alone. But her attitudes were so graceful and so natural that he knew he might

never find so useful a model. Indeed, she suddenly suggested an idea that filled him with new spirit.

She had been posing a month for him by this time. The last hour was always spent in rapid sketches of difficult positions suggesting movement, sometimes very tiring. Resting after one of these, she recalled so vividly the *Sacred and Profane Love* attributed to Titian, that George at first fancied himself under a hallucination. He passed his hand over his eyes only to see that it was true. The photograph on the wall beside her no doubt aided the reminiscence. Seizing on the pose he made two rapid sketches and compared them with the picture. They might have been drawn from the same model: only the hands were different.

Venetian art has naught more ravishing than this, this long low panel with its tender landscape. On the margin of an antique well, ornate with sculptured reliefs, sit two female figures, so exquisitely placed that their variant enticements still are balanced. She on the right, undraped, her lips half open and voluptuously modelled, holds a censer with its rapturous fragrance up to heaven. On the left is a serener womanhood, love diviner—richly clad, but richer her chaste thoughts. Between them Cupid stirs the amorous waters.

From the mere photograph one could not judge the colour, but this only nurtured inspiration. Just the other day George had seen the copy of a Holbein made by Henner, where the spirit of the modern had reincarnated the original—the colour no more inlaid but vitally ingrowing. Here was a chance for a different experiment. Suppose he stepped still more in spirit with the old master, helped out by the living model on the base of this composition. Afterwards he might visit Italy, and compare with the original.

For a week he threw up everything to work out this idea. Ethel was as eager as himself, for her other reason. George's thirty francs a week made her life far less luxurious than that secured before with easier morals or with her former wealth. Cravings once aroused are not lightly crushed; and, had not her impulse been diverted to a sensu-

ous religion, she might have broken loose. Now, however, she spent the whole day with George, who provided more generous fare when she was with him than when he was alone. He was frightened when she fainted, afraid he had overtired her, and so he made amends at dinner. It was so much easier for her to be good like this, with wine and sweetmeats.

A week, and still he had found no solution to his problem. He had sketched her in a score of lights, gaining suggestions of colour, but never as he wished it. The problem seemed impossible, unless—unless he were to tackle it in the open air, as of course the original implied. Of course! There was the key. The problem must always baffle if worked out only in a studio.

"What makes you so distraught?" asked Ethel that evening as they sat over their cigarettes in their usual restaurant. She was beginning to enjoy life again, and had been talking brightly all through dinner. Some absurd answer told her that he was not listening.

George flicked off his ash.

"I'm stuck with that picture. I'm on the wrong lines."

"How?" she answered, her heart pulled up. "Am I not good enough? Don't I pose well? I'm sorry I fainted to-day."

"No, it's not you. You have the ideal figure—especially for the Profane Love."

Then he wished he had expressed it differently.

"I mean," he hastened to add, "it's the light that's wrong. It should be done or at least conceived not in a studio but in the open air. The whole picture implies it, and I was a fool not to have seen it before."

She was fear's captive. Was this the end? Was it an excuse to break off with her?

He saw the strain of her face.

"What if I took you with me into the country?"

"Oh!" she cried, with clasped hands.

"That's right," he said. "It would be best for both of us. This studio life is too hard for you just yet, and we both want a change."

"But how?" she asked. "Do you know of any place so secluded that it would be possible?"

"We could at any rate try. You remember that landscape I showed you—the *Ode to Psyche* one? About ten miles from there in the forest is an out-of-the-way nook. I could go to a cottage I know at Marlotte. Some parts there of course are overrun, not all. We cannot stay in Paris all the summer, anyway."

"But how about me? How can I live? Is it cheap?"

"Oh, we'll manage that; you can live *chez Mallet*—that's the hotel," and then his thoughts went back to the picture.

A little after Jean Defrain entered the restaurant with a woman whom George particularly loathed. Jean greeted them ironically. After all, his inference was only natural. George and Ethel had been so long together now, so often seen at galleries, and such *tête-à-tête* in such a place at such an hour meant in Paris as a rule something more than a platonic friendship. Ethel's face, as they came in, was flushed with excitement at the thought of the country, but in front of her was an empty glass. The galling thing to George was that he should be derided by such a woman.

"Let's get out of this," he said. "We can have coffee at the studio, and make our plans."

As they rose to leave he heard Jean's mocking laughter. Ethel heard it too and faced him angrily. When Jean waved his hand familiarly, it seemed as if she were on the point of tears. George saw her lips trembling, and laid his hand on hers. She was so evidently grateful that he did not take it away, and so they passed into the street.

In their Bohemian world, an evening visitation such as this meant nothing, and yet he slowed down as they approached the studio. As for Ethel, she had not yet recovered from the shock of finding how precarious was her claim on George. What if he had told her that he must leave her? Would she have drifted back into the old life? Could she have borne the discipline of simple living by herself?

Why should she not take warning? Why should she not try to make the bond more close? George did not seem to hate her any longer, and he would never leave her to poverty or—the other thing—if—if——

Still he was so different from other men—like granite. Was he too hard and cold?

She had been too sudden the first time she had offered herself.

He hardly knew her then, and he was thinking only of his career. Now it was different. They were friends, good friends, and this was no world of chaperons. She had more chance now—and it was her only chance.

She would take the risk.

George, who hated stoves, had built an English hearth into the studio wall. The fire was blazing, filling the room with pleasant warmth.

"This is just like home," she said, slipping down on a stool by the fender.

Coffee was soon ready, a delicious brew. George, in his old bachelor way, tilted his chair and leaned over the fire for company.

"You would really like to go?"

"Why, it's lovely," she said, her hands over her knee. "I am sick of Paris, and I have wanted ever so much to get away, but how could I? And then I seemed to be useful to you, especially of late. You said just now that I was just the ideal for that—Profane Love. Besides——"

She hesitated.

"Were you thinking of to-night—Jean Defrain?"

"Yes, here I can't help meeting those who have known me, who misunderstand. It is not fair to you. I have hindered you enough already. In the country it would be different. And then——"

"And then——"

"I am afraid—of Wolseley. We might meet him again here, and he might come between us—between you and me."

It was her first shaft. She dared not look up in his face, but sat all huddled up.

His silence made her rush on.

"I am afraid of many things. To-night you frightened me. I thought at first that I was of no use to you, that you were tired of me, and were making excuses. Perhaps you are tired of me. Perhaps you are too poor to keep this up."

"No," said George. "I can just manage."

"Just manage! Don't you think it would be simpler if——"

She looked up in his face, and their eyes met. It was electric. He understood.

Her lids were the first to fall. No retreat was possible.

"Can't you understand," she went on rather unsteadily, "I have not really changed?"

He still said nothing.

"I am at your mercy," she said, catching his hand. "Perhaps you can do without me. I can't do without you. It's my only chance."

At last he spoke.

"You said that before. Then it meant something else."

"Yes," she said. "That was before I knew myself. Now I have found out. I cannot, I cannot be alone."

The firelight was playing in her hair. As she looked up once again, it seemed to flame in his heart.

"I still am pretty, amn't I?" she said.

His lips moved, but without words.

"Tell me your thoughts," she said. "I am pretty, amn't I?"

"I was thinking," he answered slowly, "that that is what Delilah must have said to Samson. Would you too bring the Philistines upon me?"

"Yes, but it is different now. This is not England. I want to make amends for all that happened before. Tell me that I am pretty—and let the warm love in."

She was very fair.

"At least it might be an experience," he thought.

She was as fair as Delilah, and he was no stronger than Samson.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MARLOTTE AND BARBIZON

AS they drew up at the station Ethel jumped out in glorious spirits. No bird uncaged could have been more happy. They were not the only passengers to alight. A carriageful of family poured itself slowly on to the platform. Towering over all was the father in loose brown cloak, wide brown trousers, and soft brown wideawake hat. Surely another artist this.

"Oh," said George, "it swarms with them. The *Mare aux Fées* near here exists for painters and mosquitoes."

The Artist in Brown was evidently known, for the porter neglected George and Ethel till he had safely packed the others into their private conveyance.

"That must be a great artist," said George, when at last the porter deigned to reappear.

"To be sure. Look at the size of his luggage!"

In humbler fashion, on the common omnibus, the two travelled up with the village parcels to Marlotte. They were still outside the forest, a little to Ethel's disappointment. She had expected to find herself at once in ferny glades. Old Mallet grumbled when they passed his hostel, but up they went, and along to the outskirts of the village, where the cottage and a taciturn old peasant woman waited for them. A drab, uninteresting street, thought Ethel, till she saw it next morning at four o'clock in its pearly cloak of twilight. Then, then it was surely a lane of Paradise.

Ethel was a town bird, and George had taken her to one of the loveliest spots in France. Was it any wonder that she should be lifted out of herself for the moment? To wake up early with the scent of the morning and watch the first faint light of day steal softly through the lattices;

to go out with George, and while he painted to gather fresh flowers for their simple table; to breakfast in the open air, shaded by a delicious tree from the morning sun; to lie idly at the edge of the forest, listening to the swish, swish of the wind in the trees, building a song out of its sweet music; to fancy that George was coming to grow fond of her, to find her more and more a comrade day by day, to be a figure in his pictures and in his life—all these things brought her new gaiety and charm.

Fortune seemed to favour the new alliance. On the second evening of their immigration, the close of a quiet day in May, he caught the light that he needed for his picture. Only half an hour of it, but the memory was ineffaceable.

From that moment George became a whirlwind of colour. During the preceding summer he had not actually painted so much as soaked himself in the atmosphere of the place. The country was so new to him, so different in character from the heavy landscape he remembered in the Chilterns. A painter must get first acclimatised to the light and tone of such peculiar beauty before he dares to tackle it with any hope of mastery. So he had explored almost the whole of the forest and its edges, Keats in his hand, Millet and Rousseau and Diaz in his eyes, searching out and memorising the modelling of trees and glades and their aerial envelope. Of course he had sketched, and had completed the one picture, but that he knew in his heart to be a failure.

All that education was now at his elbow. He met the familiar friends of form and colour face to face. For too long he had been obsessed by the town. Here in the open he was in a broader world. Nature after all was bigger than man. The eye that all the winter had been content with delicate shades and gradations battled at last with fuller masses of colour and of tone. Glowing shadows and vivid sunlight gripped him, smashed him. When at last the light faded into *crépuscule* he was a lover who for the first time feels that mystic trembling of the senses, silent, almost wondering.

He did not love Ethel. That might never come. George

would analyse his feelings with an acumen that he wished he could transfer to his work in art. He knew that this was no sympathy of souls. The past could not be blotted out. He understood at last that in a human relation he could never find a great emotion, that he was capable of sympathy, passion, hate, all to a degree, but only to a degree. Even in his work he had showed so far only talent and individuality, never genius. Fatalism crept upon him. He was content to live for the present, getting as much happiness as possible with the least cost to his neighbours.

Yet there were already moments when he felt the vast pulse of Nature, when he felt that he was merged in great moods. So it was sometimes when he walked with Ethel along solitary paths away from the high road. One such moment was the sweetest of his memories. They had come upon a break in the forest, familiar and yet strange. The truth was flashed upon him that this was the scene of his favourite Rousseau, but with the evening not morning light upon it. It was impossible to speak, and Ethel in curious sympathy was also silent. There they stood as two souls might stand in the presence of the eternal Truth.

All through Ethel's career, whatever she had done had always been so tuned to her surroundings that she never knew her character was being touched, and it was only in moments of great excitement that she realised there had been any change at all. Now the change was for the better. The ugly past was slipping from her mind. She was with a hard-working, fairly healthy man, and she suited herself without much effort to her mate. There was no need for luxury here. Sufficient unto the day was the pleasure thereof. The healthier conditions of life contributed to her comfort—she had the stimulant of purer air.

When night had fallen she would sit and read aloud the poetry that George particularly loved. Ah, how exquisite was her voice! Only a woman who had lived through passion could have put such passion into words. The music surged into his heart, an ocean whose tide was not to be denied. He might perhaps have taken up his pencil

to portray her as she read—but no, but no! It was an hour for reverie.

So the summer slipped along.

Ethel was eager to see Millet's house at Barbizon, and to Barbizon one day they drove—some eighteen miles across the forest. Rooms were found with a little difficulty at an hotel. It was a Saturday, and a holiday, and the once old-world village was overrun with pleasure seekers, no artist visible. The air vibrated with the roll of carriages, even with an occasional motor-car, and any artist would have been swamped by Philistines. Not till they had walked past the corner of the road that turns to Chailli did they find the quiet air once breathed and loved by Millet and Rousseau.

Here were old farm-yards, fat with happiness, and here the gossips of the walls. Asking leave to enter one of the yards they heard the munch of cows and found the cattle warm under a roof of spider-webs a century thick.

"Do any artists still come here?" George asked the farmer's wife.

"Yes, monsieur," she said sadly, "but not the same artists. These new ones paint the colours that do not exist."

A little further on were fields, and in the distance, very sweet, the silhouette of Chailli.

Then back to the whirl.

George was sitting at a window overlooking the courtyard of the hotel when he heard a voice that seemed familiar.

"Where are the pictures that you do not sell?" it said.

The speaker then appeared, American in garb, though the accent was good French. By his side a lady, also from the States—no! it was Ravin and his wife!

They were coming from the room reserved for pictures displayed especially for tourists. The *patron* himself escorted them. He was shrugging his shoulders, no doubt at Ravin's question, for he was there on business.

"Ah well," continued Ravin, "what is your charge for rooms?"

"Eight francs each, monsieur."

"But I ask for artists' prices."

Again the *patron* shrugged his shoulders.

"We have no artists' prices."

"Very well, we go elsewhere."

As they were politely ushered out, George leaned over to hail them. Then he remembered his companion.

Suppose he persuaded them to stay, how could he explain his presence with Ethel. Ravin would surely remember her—that incident of the night—he never believed in her. He was sure to remember. How could he understand? How could he follow the change of mind that had at last persuaded George to such a step? No, it was impossible.

Ethel was tired and lying in the other room, so that she knew nothing of what passed. Perhaps it was as well.

Furious with himself, George waited till he heard a carriage roll away. Then he rushed out to the entrance.

By that time the vehicle had stopped at another hostelry. Should he conceal the fact of Ethel, and reclaim acquaintance? A few steps down the road, only to return. No, it was too late!

From the shadow of the entrance he stood watching. Again Ravin and his wife came out, and again stopped at yet another inn further on. The comedy was repeated at the corner.

This was a new trait in the generous Frenchman, to haggle for the price of rooms. His clothes did not suggest poverty. Was this the domestication of Miss Marriott?

Baffled by Barbizon and its prices, the artist and his wife shouted a direction to their coachman, who turned his horses and drove off down the road to Chailli.

Ethel could not understand why George was so short-tempered all that evening. Had she unwittingly offended him? She was unconscious of anything but fatigue. Surely he did not think she was an Amazon.

It was the same at the morning coffee. Sharp words passed between them, and George said roughly that he meant to walk to Chailli and alone. He would come back to *déjeuner*.

As he entered Chailli a train steamed out of the station. His heart sickened with foreboding, and the fear was right. The first hotel he stopped at had been the hotel where Ravin and his wife had stayed.

"Yes, but they had just left for Paris. They said they had had enough of Barbizon. A flying trip through Europe. The gentleman, though French, was settled in America."

The chance of meeting him again was gone, no doubt for ever.

Yet for the first time he felt ashamed. How he must have lowered himself to be afraid to meet a Bohemian like Ravin! If only a chance should come of breaking off with Ethel he would take it. Still, was it altogether her fault? Was he not also to blame, and should she suffer for it? For the present he would pretend no barrier had come between them. That was only fair to Ethel.

Well, well, perhaps it was for the best. Away with the past! He had to face the future.

So it was that when he rejoined his companion, George apologised. Ethel thought it was the exercise that had improved his temper, and resolved to profit by the experience. George had been sitting about sketching too much of late. She must keep him in good humour by encouraging more walks.

On their return to Marlotte she saw at once an opportunity. That night she read from Keats, and turned to the *Ode to Psyche*.

"You have never taken me there, to that part of the forest," she said. "I should so like to see it. It must be beautiful. But of course don't bother if it would interfere with your work."

"No, it wouldn't interfere," said George. "I should like to go again, and see why I was wrong in my colour. Perhaps I could tell now. But it's a long walk—over ten miles there. Are you strong enough?"

"I'm sure I could do it. This country life has made me fit for anything."

It was agreed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE LOST BIRTHRIGHT

RAIN had fallen during the night. The wind was fresh and cool. A fantastic mind might have imagined fairies in the boughs swinging censers, so fragrant was the air they breathed. Through a strip of forest, then up over the hill into more forest, until Ethel sank out of breath upon a mossy slope and laughingly demanded *déjeuner*.

"Only another mile," said George.

At last they were there. His picture had been truer than he thought. Perhaps he had been too literal. The values in the distance had been his stumbling block.

Walking had been hot work, for the midday sun quickly dissolved the moisture of the morning. The dryness of their bread and cheese also made the little stream worth more than gold. How sweet its waters were—sweeter than any nectar! So prettily it ran under its flowery banks that they agreed to freshen their feet in its delicate tide.

George lay there, dreaming dreams. Into his mind came the memory of that melody of Brahms, with its still more exquisite words:

"Ich ruhe still im hohen grünen Gras."

Then he remembered the Plato he had read, long years ago, and the Eros he had never been able to understand. Now he understood it, the being part of Nature and the yearning for Nature. Why did one learn philosophy in musty libraries, not in the open fields? There above him was that fathomless blue. Let him but shut his eyes and

it was night. Ah, what was that wonderful passage in one of Millet's letters to Sensier? Millet must have felt it all in this very forest of Fontainebleau.

"Oh, how I wish I could make those who see my work feel the splendours and terrors of the night! One ought to be able to make people hear the songs, the silences and murmurings of the air. They should feel the infinite. Is there not something terrible in thinking of these lights which rise and disappear, century after century, without varying? They light both the joys and sorrows of man, and when our world goes to pieces, the beneficent sun will watch the universal desolation without pity."

"I hear voices," said Ethel, waking him from his reverie. "At least a voice, the voice of a child."

"Probably a peasant from some neighbouring village."

"There is a man too—a Parisian," said Ethel, listening.

"Artists perhaps, like ourselves. They don't concern us."

Ethel lay down again with her head on leafy moss.

"There they are again," she said a moment later, and springing up she looked curiously into the trees.

"Eve all over again," grumbled George. "Can't you lie down and be happy?"

"I shall explore," she said, and moved away into the wood.

"They are up stream," said George as she went off. "Their voices are carried down by the water."

Then he turned over again.

In spite of himself he too listened, although he did not follow her. The voices of the man and the child came intermittently, then ceased. There was only the sough of trees and the ripple of water. Then, very faint, a sound of sobbing.

George leaned over the water to make sure. Yes, there it was.

"What can have happened?" he thought, and quietly made his way towards the sound. Fancies flitted before

him, finding no reason. Some trees, then a clearing and he was there. Ethel sat alone, and as if heart-broken.

Before her was an easel on which a half-finished canvas stretched. The pool and leafy bank which formed the *mise en scène* were laid in with masterly precision. So too the figure, slung in with a few strokes—the figure of a little girl. Then George remembered and understood. It was Claire, just as in Pourgot's Salon picture. The *motif* of the picture was the same, though this was in the open air, with the sunlight and the tremor of leaves. Pourgot himself must be painting, and had left this canvas, perhaps for a rest. Of course! He remembered now. Pourgot was a native of this very district of Fontainebleau. Far away through the forest he could hear the little one's laughter. Ethel must have heard it too, for she sat up listening. As yet she had not perceived George, who stood behind, scarce breathing. Then she turned again to the picture and to bitter grief.

George looked again at the canvas. It was only the child that he saw this time—the child and the mother.

Again the voice of young laughter, this time nearer.

"Ethel," whispered George, "she is coming."

With a cry, she turned round, showing a face so unutterably sad that he was shocked.

"How old she looks," he thought.

Nearer still, but Ethel seemed rooted to the spot. Then she leaned forward, and with a gesture of exquisite tenderness kissed her fingers to the little figure that laughed upon the canvas.

The voice was at hand, two voices—that of the child, and of an elder, a woman.

George caught Ethel by the hand and pulled her away. She came unwillingly. It was as in a nightmare.

Boughs were pushed aside, and into the open burst the little child, the child of the picture, little Claire, her arms all full of flowers. No flowers so lovely as her face.

Ethel wrenched her hand away.

"Claire!" she cried, holding out her arms.

The child started back, half frightened, to her companion. This was an elderly woman, surely Mother Labori.

Holding Claire close to her, she looked at Ethel, and angrily remembered her.

"You!" she cried fiercely, "what are you doing here? Have you forgotten your contract, your oath?"

Ethel trembled and again caught George's hand. Then, with a voice infinitely sad, she faltered:

"May not a mother——"

"Mother!" hissed the woman. "Away with you—you—harlot!"

Ethel shrank before that avalanche of scorn. Then turned and fled blindly through the forest.

George found it no easy task to keep pace with her. The scene had passed so swiftly that he could not collect his thoughts. Suddenly she stumbled on a root, falling heavily to the ground. George was on his knees to pick her up, but she only struggled to get away.

How they found their way back to their cottage that night, neither of them could ever tell. The merest chance brought them on to the right road, and after a tramp of fourteen miles the light of the familiar window brought faint cheer to their hearts.

Next day poured with rain, and George never knew more miserable moments. Ten years seemed to have been added to Ethel's life. He had once put his arm round her neck in sympathy, but she had hysterically spurned his pity. That made him sulky and irritable; and, as his more critical nature began to assert itself, he felt thankful that he was not bound to her for life. There were advantages in Bohemian matings after all, whatever moralists might say.

Next day was fine, but Ethel clearly meant to stay at home. After a silent breakfast, George made a great show of getting ready his paint-box, but she buried herself in a book. He banged the door angrily behind him, but saw through the window that she had not moved.

"Damn her!" he thought. "It is her own fault that she does not get sympathy."

A glorious day, and the return to work soon restored his spirits. Time sped so fast that he forgot all save beauty. A thought of Ethel would come, but only for a moment.

At last the failing light and the now poignant sense of hunger would not be denied. He collected his things, and retraced his steps to the cottage. The lamp had been lit already, for the window shone warm and translucent in the dusk. He stepped almost on tiptoe to the door that opened to their sitting-room, and listened.

No sound.

He opened the door. The room was empty. Ethel was evidently upstairs.

Food was spread on the table.

"Perhaps a headache," he thought.

As he laid down his things, he looked at his hands. Very dirty, so he washed them at the pump. By Jove, how hungry he was!

A note on his plate:

"Good-bye.

"She was right. - I'm a bad lot, and I had better recognise it. It's no good my living on here and letting you get to like me. I am what she says, and I should end by dragging you down, after the fit of virtue had passed off. We have had a good time, and you have been so kind to me. It would be a pity to spoil it. I'm off to the old life. Forget me.

"ETHEL."

Poor girl!

She had a good heart. How pitiful and how cruel the world!

It would be useless to try and stop her. She must have been gone some hours. She was gone, and Paris was a haystack.

He would miss her, but still she meant so little to him.

His picture could be finished now without her. And had he not been waiting for such an opportunity of separation?

Had she begun to drag him down? Perhaps a little. He did not see it in his work, only at times in his thoughts. Perhaps it was as well that the affair was over.

It had been an experience, one that he would not care to repeat, though the taste had not been bitter.

Next day he was up earlier than ever; and, though he found work difficult at first, by evening he knew that it was no longer misery to be alone.

There is no balm like work.

Only once did he allow his thoughts to dwell for any length of time on that interlude. One last walk before he returned to Paris took him to the place where tragedy had centred.

For a long time he hesitated before he went, wondering if it would not be better to forget utterly. Then he juggled with himself. He would go once more, not because he had been with Ethel, but in order again to compare his "Ode to Psyche" landscape with the spot that had inspired it. Again he would try to find out where he had failed.

The leaves were turning, but the stream rippled on as it had rippled on that distressing day. Still the sky was blue, and sweet the air.

He had his Keats with him, that well-thumbed volume, and again he hesitated at the fatal page. Strange that a rhyme so ethereal should have issued in such pain.

How exquisite the words were! The oftener he read them, the more he wondered—and the more he understood. How he had misunderstood! How was it that he had so often syllabled this music without discovering the meaning? And yet that last verse made it plain enough.

"Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane

In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new-grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind. . . .

And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds and bells and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who, breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win——"

"Thought! Thought!" he cried. "That's it!"
Psyche! Psyche! To think that any one should clothe
you in fleshly form!

There was the solution at his door, when he had been
tramping through experiences to find it.

Away with the flesh! On now with the spirit!

All the way home he sang to himself at his discovery.
It was worth a wire to Reid at twopence a word.

The forest had never seemed so beautiful. He was so
mad that he could have kissed the trees.

What a life there was before him—work and work and
work!

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PICTURE IN THE SALON

BACK in Paris, George did not make any active search for Ethel, nevertheless was actively on the watch. When the next Salon came round, Pourgot's picture of Claire was hailed as one of the best of the year, certainly as one of the most popular. It was reproduced in photographs shown in a thousand windows. Paris was obsessed by it.

If Ethel still remained in Paris, George felt sure that she must haunt this room in the Salon. Unwilling as he was to take her up again, he felt compelled more than once to go there just to see if she had not been drawn to the picture too. Perhaps she might work it mischief. Fanatics were known to hack offending canvases. Ethel might perhaps be driven to a like folly.

It was not Ethel whom he found there near the picture, but always—Pourgot! That little man was evidently child of Vanity. George would go there somewhat sad, then regain his humour when he realised the artist's hunger for applause. Pourgot was glued there, feigning to study the other pictures, but all the while keeping his eye on those who passed his own. Did they stop to look at it, admire it—then his face beamed with happiness. Did they pass it carelessly or criticise, then he gesticulated as if protesting. "No! No! You are unfair—it really is a fine painting, my very best."

If on the other hand Pourgot noticed any artist friend approaching, he would slip away into another room. He was vain enough not to wish to be counted vain. That would be to be ridiculous.

George had his discovery to himself.

Ethel never came.

Perhaps she stayed away because she wished to forget. Such indeed was the spirit one might have expected from her letter of farewell. She had sold her birthright. She must for ever be a stranger to her child. Of what use were vain reminders?

The shadow of the living Ethel did not fall upon the picture, and yet the Fates, spinning their web, would not leave all shadow out. The darkness of their choosing was cast by Wolseley Greville.

It was on a morning late in May. George, out of taste with work, urgent with the call of country, stepped along to the Salon just for one last look. There were not yet many visitors—it was still so early—but from a little distance in the adjoining room one could see the inevitable watcher hovering round his darling canvas. Pourgot had not yet recognised George in the distance, and was impatient for this fresh visitor to add his tribute. George, however, had come to see the comedy, not to play in it, and dillydallied, therefore, over a foolish flower-piece which no doubt owed its presence to some friend at court.

Then the sound of strident English voices. Turning round he saw two men, evidently in liquor, unsteadily come in. One of them had a limp. It was Wolseley Greville. Repulsive as he had always been, Greville looked more bestial still in drink. That was a satyr's leer.

George felt his knees a-tremble, but controlled himself sufficiently to walk unnoticed to a corner.

Greville and the other had evidently come to see what Cameron called "them noods," and fortunately there were few such in the room where George evaded them. But Pourgot's room was more what they expected, and when they came to Pourgot's picture of Claire, they swayed in front of it, hiccougging their dirty laughter.

Except for Pourgot, they were alone, but Pourgot in his pent-up fury was as good as twelve. English he hardly understood, but no one could mistake the significance of this.

Tense with passion, he pushed them away, and then when Greville resisted, slashed his gloves across the latter's face.

"Hullo!" said Greville, rather sobered, "look at this spit-fire. What's the matter with this French son-of-a-gun?"

Pourgot, unable to express his rage, pointed to the picture, and then to the door. Greville, all slavering, misunderstood.

"Oui, oui!" he said, pointing to the picture, and then at himself. "Right you are! Bring the girl along—for me—for me—cette fille—pour moi!"

"No! No!" Pourgot almost screamed. Then seeing George, who had approached, thinking it time to intervene. "Ah, my friend, this *maquereau* has insulted me." Then whipping out a card, "Tell him I will fight him—I will kill him."

Catching Pourgot's arm:

"Cher maître," said George, "do not compromise yourself with men such as these. They are drunk; we will get the attendant to throw them out."

Meanwhile the attendants, hearing the noise, had come of their own accord. Seizing Greville and his companion, they made short work of these worthies. Pourgot they knew, and with the aid of vast gesticulation and commotion, pacified his wounded fury.

The incident had not been without its humorous side, but George went back to his studio ill at ease.

Ethel might be gone, but Wolseley Greville remained. That sinister presence had always been of evil omen.

Should George leave France?

No, not yet. It would not be fair to Ethel. He must give her a chance. Perhaps he could assist her still. She might even require his aid, with this foul blackguard now in Paris.

And so, though he might easily have slipped away, George kept to the paths she might remember. That summer, and the next two summers also, he returned to Fontainebleau and Marlotte. The intervening winters were at Paris.

CHAPTER XL

CARNIVAL AT VIENNA

THUS it was that George remained on his familiar ground at Marlotte and at Fontainebleau. Here was always a sympathetic landscape, and the peasants were used to painters. He sent his "Little Shepherd Boy" with two other canvases to the Academy, only to be rejected. A similar fate next year. This might have made him angry, had he not won a mention at the Salon and a medal at Munich. He was elected to the International, and found it hard to keep pace with the demands of Continental Exhibitions and collectors who vied with one another in encouraging so distinctive a note in modern art.

This gave George the wherewithal to travel. He spent a year in the Lowlands, another in Germany, another in Austria.

As to his art, although distinctive, it was not really a new note.

It stood out from the rest because it was so thorough and sincere. In the haste to produce, or in the struggle to be brilliant, or in the rush to pay the rent, these are old-fashioned virtues, yet virtues all the same.

Instead of sending out eleventh-hour pictures, he put his canvases aside till he could see them with a fresh eye, then modelled and remodelled, adding a half-tone here and a plane there till the world was re-created in which the first inspiration had drawn breath. "Infinite patience" was Reid's original gospel, and infinite patience made possible the care, the placing, the analysis and re-construction of the light which made George's pictures seem so satisfying and complete. They were not tight or Aca-

demic, nor, on the other hand, were they of the brush-mark school, where you can hardly see the picture for the paint. Harmonious, broad, unaffected, they held the eye of any that had eyes to see because they were so luminous, so full of atmosphere, so admirably balanced.

Figures played a notable part in most of his romantic landscapes. But the picture which won him a place in the Luxembourg was landscape pure and simple—that quiet “Dawn on the Canal,” painted at Ghent under the walls of the Castle of the Courts of Flanders. If you have seen it, you surely cannot have forgotten it: the warm red mass of roofs, old houses with their back-ends brooding on the waters, the grey-red brick beyond, one white façade lit up with a splash of blue, the mirror of low-toned reflection, one note of green in the castle garden, massive battlemented walls, and over it all the sweet aerial envelope of spring.

In all George’s travels he was solitary. Of course he made hotel friends, meteoric table-mates who flashed in and out of his acquaintance. Men who bought his pictures could not understand why he had so little to say about art, and about himself. Sometimes they wondered if they had done right to buy at all. They were mostly speculators in “futures,” and he talked as if the world were but his coffin.

The truth is that art-talk bored him. He knew what he liked, what he wanted to express, and knew the futility of mere æstheticism. The hours spent in argument were lost to action, when he might be studying atmosphere and light.

A curious and unexpected record of an incident in Austria appears in the posthumous “Memoirs of a Courtesan,” written by that brilliant, strange degenerate Marie von Ischl.

Here is a translation of the chapter in which she mentions him:

“Sitting in the entrance hall of the *Bristol* and watching the come-and-go of traffic, I noticed a clean-shaven high-

life bipped go up to the counter, purchase a *Daily Mail* and pretend to read it, while in a mirror hidden in the palm of his right hand he studied my own very elegant figure.

"As I had a rendezvous with the Prince in half an hour, I was in no mood to engage just then in any so flagrant an *affaire*, but I flicked a note across to the head porter, asking, 'Who and what is this elegant?' Answer—'Mr. George Grange, London—said to be an artist.'

"On which I made a telling, languorous exit, regretfully.

"I was risking the loss of a new thrill.

"An artist in such clothes?

"He was a woman-hater, not a woman-hunter—I felt sure of it.

"I am bored to death by amorous fools.

"As luck would have it, the Prince had a summons to Budapest. This left me the evening free, so after the theatre I went to the Redout.

"Although in the full height of Carnival, it was not really gay. So many of the women were, alas, so old. It was their only chance—under the mask—to drink one last sad drop of passion. But I had an instinct I should meet this man again.

"There, leaning against a pillar, his crush hat under his arm, hands in pocket *à l'anglaise*, stood my dandy artist, studying the crowd.

"I had come to intrigue, in my black mask and domino with the old-gold dress and shoes.

"'Good evening,' I said, going boldly to him. 'How do you like our Vienna? Is it not gay?'

"He turned his head towards me, but otherwise did not move.

"I had met this Rock of Gibraltar attitude in his compatriots before and was not dismayed.

"'Yes,' I said. 'This is Vienna—sad, mad, bad, glad, as your poet said of something else.'

"One hand came out of its pocket. Faint flicker of a smile. But still no answer.

"You are looking for some one?"

" 'Yes.'

" 'A woman?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Won't I do?'

" 'Sorry.'

" 'Do I look too virtuous?'

" 'No.'

" 'Ah! I am too wicked. I thought so. You are very clever to penetrate my character through this disguise. But then you are an artist, are you not?'

"The Rock began to crumble.

" 'Possibly.'

" 'You paint pictures—real pictures in oils?'

" 'Sometimes.'

" 'How interesting! I had always heard that English artists could just paint Christmas cards.'

"He smiled again and lit a cigarette.

" 'Tell me the name of your friend,' I said. 'Perhaps I know her.'

" 'I have no friend.'

" 'Bravo!' I cried. 'That is a sentence of four words. We shall soon have quite a conversation. What a nice companion you would be, say in a thunderstorm.'

" 'Come,' he said, relieving the pillar. 'Let's have a drink.'

"We found a quiet table and the waiter brought each of us a spritz.

" 'Tell me,' I said, 'Why are you not gay like all the rest of us? This is Vienna—Carnival—Redout—two o'clock in the morning.'

" 'I catch a train at eight.'

" 'Six hours of glorious life—Pros't—*omnes eodem cogimur*—or as you say in London, "We all must travel Underground."'

"He blew rings beautifully.

" 'I see,' I interjected. 'You mean to imply these hours must end in smoke.'

"Looking me in the eyes:

" 'You speak most excellent English,' he admitted.

" 'Yes,' I said. 'My fourth and thirteenth lovers both were lords.'

" 'Eighteenth or nineteenth century?' was his astonishing reply.

"I could have killed him.

" 'No, no,' I answered, calming myself. 'I am not another Ninon l'Enclos. I am not half so old as my foolish boast might lead you to believe—I have lived rapidly.'

" 'So I can imagine,' he replied. 'Waiter—another spritz—no, only one—coffee for me.'

" 'You are not fair,' I continued. 'You judge too quickly. You do not know me.'

"He was a furious smoker—five cigarettes already since we had sat down.

" 'Yet I am not afraid,' I went on eagerly. 'I like to hear the truth. Tell me what you think of me. Be as cruel as you like—I shall not be angry.'

"He sat just looking at me, saying nothing.

"I began to grow nervous. I must have my answer.

" 'Tell me,' I urged. 'What do you think of me?'

" 'You?' he said at last, quite sadly. 'You are one of the vast army of superfluous women.'

"And with that he rose and left me.

"Ugh! I could not sleep that night, thinking of what he had said.

"Was I, too, growing old?

"The Prince came back from Pesth—very affectionate—a lovely diamond bracelet. No, I was still in my prime.

"I sauntered through His Highness's apartments, reading the letters that he left so carelessly about and making myself at home. Then I examined the walls. I had not hitherto had such an opportunity by daylight.

"Candidly I do not admire the Prince's taste. It is too modern for me. But there was one picture that I could not pass.

“‘What do you think of it?’ His Highness said, seeing that I stood before it. I had not noticed it before, but now I could not leave it.

“How beautiful it was! I recognised at once the garden at Miramar—the tall Lombardy poplars, the formal hedges, the blaze of flowers, the delicious sculpture, and beyond, the deep blue Adriatic.

“Miramar! It was there that I went with Tony when we were at Trieste, waiting for the steamer to Dalmatia.

“‘Perfect! Perfect!’ I cried, tears in my eyes. ‘Who is the artist?’

“‘Would you believe it, an Englishman—no, Scotch—he called himself George Grange—a silent and unsociable creature—no one could make friends with him. He had asked permission to paint there in the garden. I came upon him one day when he had almost finished. I could not let a master-piece like that go by.’

“‘No, indeed,’ I said. ‘Did he ask much for it?’

“‘More than your diamond bracelet.’

“‘I would rather have the picture,’ I suggested.

“I begged, I prayed, I cajoled—in vain.

“His Highness would not part with it.

“Kismet! George Grange was not for me.”

CHAPTER XLI

UNDER ITALIAN SKIES

AFTER Vienna Innsbruck, and then from Innsbruck in the footsteps of Goethe over the Brenner into Italy.

Have you read the *Italienische Reise*? Then you remember Goethe and the Court of Weimar—cold, narrow, provincial, Gothic. Eager to see Rome, Goethe escapes and by postilion crosses the Alps into the warm classic South. Verona—Vicenza—Venice—Palladio's great architecture persuades him and pervades. Then at last Rome receives him a final convert to the Renaissance.

Goethe travelled by postilion, but George, starting in early spring, not autumn, found it more seasonable to make the route by train. At Mori, however, he left the railway for the Riva road, so that he might not miss the azure splendour of the Lago di Garda. After a delicious day at Torbole he took the steamer down the Lake, stopping here and there as Goethe had done over a hundred years before. For the first time since his student days he was glad that he knew a little Latin. Here in the warm sunshine, among the olives and the citrons, he remembered he was in the country of Catullus. The Latin itself he had mostly forgotten, but as he came to Desenzano he caught the echo in Tennyson:

“Row us out from Desenzano, to your Sirmione row!
So they row'd, and there we landed—‘O venusta Sirmio!’
There to me thro' all the groves of olive in the summer
 glow,
There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers
 grow,
Came that ‘Ave atque Vale’ of the Poet's hopeless woe,

Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen-hundred years ago, 'Frater Ave atque Vale'—as we wandered to and fro, Gazing at the Lydian laughter of the Garda Lake below Sweet Catullus's all-but-island, olive-silvery Sirmio!"

Venice he had seen before. He had remembered Turner's wonderful vision of the "Approach to Venice"—had taken steamer from Trieste to see and know that it was true. With its serene blue sky, its colour, its voluptuous languor, Venice fascinated George just as much upon this second visit. It was more easy now to understand both Titian and Giorgione.

But as he passed through Northern Italy what most of all engaged him was the pulsating industry of Turin and Milan. This after all was no mere land of picture galleries and ruins and cathedrals and palazzos. It was intense with workers. Surely it must have its living art as well as its dead Old Masters. Ah yes! there was Segantini—who painted the Alps in the Brianza, as he said, not as a background but for their own sake—who in the morning, before taking up his brush, would kneel before them as so many altars under the heavens.

George had no blind obeisance for Old Masters. He was an artist, not an art dealer. After a week at Florence he had thought, "Better one piquant young factory girl than a million dead Madonnas." Miles and miles of frescoes, altar-pieces, portraits, ended by depressing him. Why should any one add to this vast output?

This was satiety rather than arrogance. As George had worked his way through Europe he had spent half his time in the great galleries, sifting and analysing the methods of the dead. Sometimes he came across a picture there which ravished him; for instance, that Vermeer van Delft at Amsterdam—a woman reading at a window—blue and silvery grey—and that "Christ on the Cross," by Albrecht Dürer at Dresden, of deep and tender blue. It must have been of some such picture as this that Dürer wrote:

"I have painted it with great care, as you will see, using none but the best colours I could get. It is painted with good ultramarine under and over and over that again, some five or six times, and then after it was finished I painted it again twice over so that it may last a long time. If it is kept clean I know it will remain bright and fresh five hundred years, for it is not done as men are wont to paint."

These were not pictures to attract the crowd. They were small—like jewels. At Dresden many a time he had stood before the Dürer quite alone. Whereas Raphael's huge and facile Sistine Madonna had a special room, a chapel almost, rows of seats before it, with ardent and perspiring Germans.

This acreage of pictures seen at Florence was suggestive more of manufacture than of art. Yet when George came out from the galleries into the sunshine under the blue sky, and felt the gaiety and sparkle of the Italian air, he felt the inspiration come upon him, too, to be at work with brush and palette and colour, expressing the impulse of his heart before this bright and joyous vision.

Italy did this for him—it heightened the pitch to which he tuned the world in his pictures. The English and the Scots up North belong to the Cimmerians, mythical inhabitants of a land of fog:

"Dark is the land where they dwell, windy nesses and holds of the wolf."

The nature of these Northerners is to see the world sombre in tone. Constable tried to lift the veil—'light—dews—breezes—bloom—freshness' was his great gospel. He did his best, but what could that best be under a cloudy sky?

In the more pearly atmosphere of Northern France the pitch is heightened, colour is gayer, and the air less melancholy. But for the blaze of light, so light that even the shadows glow, so luminous that cobalt can count as black, where cadmium and emerald green and madder and the

whitest white are all the other primaries, where the whole atmosphere vibrates with sunshine, the artist must take his eyes and heart a little farther south.

Rome!

Baedecker starred an hotel called the *Excelsior*, and George in his innocence telegraphed for a room on the day he intended to arrive. He was received by a polite, gesticulating major-domo with:

"But, Mr. Grange! at such short notice! Impossible! But I have telephoned to the *Regina*, they will find you a room. I can recommend—most sorry!"

Certainly an obliging gentleman.

The *Regina* was also polite, but rather supercilious—evidently a private hotel and exclusive, only for the best families. George might be, and might be not all right.

The hall porter could not say whether there was a room. He would call the manager.

Well-cut clothes were the best introduction. The manager looked at George and relented.

"A room with bath on the first floor."

The whole staff suddenly became obsequious.

They waved him into a lift. It was more like a private palace.

With coat-tails swaying, the manager led the way. The room he offered was delightful—Louis XIV.

"And here—the bath-room."

He turned the handle, and preceded.

A shriek, and out he came like a pistol shot. The bath was already occupied.

"Mon Dieu!—the Princess!"

The *femme de chambre*, who had been off her guard, dashed in from the room next door and hustled them out.

Poor manager!

He kept such countenance as he could muster, and opened another door further down the passage.

"That stupid servant!" he said, "why did she not tell us what she had arranged? Why did she not lock the door? The Princess! Mon Dieu!"

He left the new guest in possession, wringing his hands.

"At any rate," thought George, as he lay in his most comfortable bed, laughing to himself, "Rome has something else to show than ruins and Madonnas."

When he woke next morning to his *café complet*, the sun was shining—did it ever rain here?—and he jumped up to dress and plan the day. There was the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Forum, enough for a thousand days; but first of all there was the Titian he had tried to reconstruct, the "Sacred and Profane Love," Ethel as his model.

Ethel! Where was she now?

Brushing away that cloud, he opened the window and inhaled the sunny air.

Sauntering out, past the still obsequious servants, he wandered into the Corso, where he found himself looking into a window full of photographs. There was one of the picture. It was at the Borghese.

"Borghese!" he said, hailing a cab.

The Roman drivers are at least as bright as those in London. They know what all the strangers do not know, that there are two Borgheses, the Palazzo in its square and the Villa at the Pincian Gate. And as the Villa was the farthest off, to the Villa they went. This was before the picture collection had been transferred to the rooms where now they may be seen, and the Villa not only did not have the picture, but moreover it was not open to the public in the mornings.

"Ah then!" said the driver, when they had found the error out, "you mean the Palazzo."

So back into the streets again. Yet it was all so wonderfully interesting, so much more up-to-date than he had expected, and the sun was shining—so who cared?

At last, a little trembling, George came to the picture of his dreams.

How perfect! How absolutely overwhelming!

Great God! To think he had the arrogance to match his skill with this!

The guardian of the room watched him suspiciously. He was so strange, he muttered so—perhaps he was a madman.

Coming up to test him:

“Monsieur,” he said, “a beautiful picture, is it not? Worth a fortune. They say that Pierpont Morgan offers twenty million lire.”

That brought George back to earth.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “yes, yes!”

Then pulled himself together, while the guardian, retiring, but still suspicious, watched him from the door-way.

The gallery closed at three, and not till three did George go out.

Here on one perfect canvas was the whole teaching of his Master.

And here, on one canvas, was the tragedy of Ethel's life.

CHAPTER XLII

ON THE TRAIL

DURING these years, George had made no deliberate search for Ethel, and yet her memory drifted perpetually across his life. Now indeed it came like Niagara upon him.

What right had he to let this soul go back into perdition without attempt to save it? She had been after all no worse a woman than he was a man. It was because she was a mother that she had ceased to be his mistress and became—alas, what had she not become?

If he had done nothing yet for Ethel, could he not do something for the little daughter Claire? Did Valérien Pourgot still look after her? Was she still his adopted daughter, or was she only a model, to become?—alas, what might she too become?

An excuse to return to Paris lay in the letter that he found when he called at the poste restante. This was an offer to purchase his "Dawn on the Canal" for the French nation.

Little as he cared now for recognition, this indeed gave George a thrill of pleasure. Now he was hall-marked.

Yes, he must leave Rome. He could come again some other time. The sun would still be shining, and the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Forum—surely they could wait.

He went to the *Wagons-Lits*, and next morning took the train for Paris.

Back in Paris, he first of all paid his respects to Pourgot. Like himself, Pourgot was an International, and had a picture in the Luxembourg—and George after all had been his pupil. Seven years almost had passed since the inci-

dent at Fontainebleau—surely it had been forgotten. Perhaps, indeed, Pourgot had never known.

Claire, George found, was still in the Rue d'Assas, but Mother Labori was dead. Claire was quite grown up. She evidently had forgotten George, for when her guardian introduced him she spoke as to a stranger. Yet in the course of conversation, when she found he was the George Grange of the International, she became most friendly—praised his pictures which she claimed that she adored.

She was a more vivacious Ethel.

Of course he saw Claire only with her five-o'clock manners. Perhaps the girl he saw was not the girl that Pourgot knew.

Seven more years added only a few grey hairs to Pourgot, but at eighteen, Claire was almost a woman—old enough to be self-willed and young enough not to hide it. The familiar life that Pourgot always allowed her accounted for much of this. She went with him everywhere as his adopted daughter. Pourgot sent her to a teacher of singing. Her young contralto filled the old studio with music—she was always singing, and Pourgot loved to hear her. If ever he had a hobby away from his art, it was that of old ballads. These Claire would sing to him over and over again, for she too was in love with melody.

Pourgot had watched her rapid growth uneasily. She matured at a tangent, and he wished he had been able to swing her earlier into his circle. Now he felt that she held her own, and there was only a memory to tie them. Would it last?

When Mother Labori died he had good reason to despair. Claire's awkward age had proved almost ungovernable. One day she had deliberately rubbed a wet palette against a valuable canvas, because he had scolded her for posing badly. At first she despised him because he kept his temper. Remorse proved her greatest punishment. She threw herself with passionate tears at his feet.

"You are too good to me," she sobbed. "Why don't you thrash me, as the clown thrashed his donkey that day at the circus?"

This repentance preceded other devilry. In moments of irritation, Pourgot sometimes thought he had made a mistake in ever taking her into his studio. At the operatic class conducted by her singing master, she made friends whom Pourgot did not like, especially a certain Leonore, who had already sung at the Follies. Claire sometimes came home late from her singing lessons, and annoyed him by singing cheap tunes which put him out of temper.

"Where did you pick that up?" he said angrily, one day after she had sung a vulgar music-hall ditty.

"Only from Leonore," said Claire, pouting, "she heard it at——"

"I don't care where she heard it. You must not sing it here."

"Why not?" replied Claire, flushing.

"Because if any one else heard you sing it you would be misunderstood."

"How?"

"Your position here."

Claire closed the piano with a snap, and Pourgot regretted having spoken.

"The world is what it is," she said, tossing her head. "I must learn something of it, if I have got to live in it."

"The world can do you no good," said Pourgot. "When you sang that song your voice sounded so common, and yet when you care your voice can be so soft and beautiful. I never heard a sweeter at the Opera."

"Why the Opera?" said Claire viciously. "The theatre for me. I could make my fortune in London."

"Who talks to you of London?" cried Pourgot, alarmed.

"Every one. Leonore—and every one."

For the first time Claire saw Maestro in a temper. He stamped up and down the studio like one possessed.

"Maestro, Maestro," she cried. "Why are you so angry? I will be good."

"It is you," he cried. "You and your Leonore. I spit at London. It is a city of Jack the Rippers."

Claire shrugged her shoulders. He was talking foolishly.

Pourgot could say no more. His heart was too full to speak. He took up his palette and mechanically started work at the canvas that happened to be fixed to his easel. Claire's anger began to melt when she saw how aimlessly he put on paint. She was sorry for the pain she had caused him. Such a Parisian could not fail to find that Maestro had come to have more than a fatherly affection for her. The discovery half pleased, half annoyed her. She was a woman, and liked to be loved. But she was a woman and hated to be tied before she could sample other men. Gratitude for Pourgot's kindness had little place in Claire's thoughts. Its sweetness indeed almost cloyed. A touch of the world's bitterness was needed to restore its proper flavour.

"Perhaps I am jealous," thought Pourgot, as he fumbled with his palette. "Better let the bird have its freedom."

"Well," he said aloud, "we won't discuss the subject any more just now. There's no use in quarrelling, is there, little one? I meant only to warn you, for your good."

Claire answered by turning to the piano and to an old ballad, one of his favourites, singing with such sweetness that the tears fell down his cheeks.

They were friends again—for nearly a week.

Pourgot, to tell the truth, was expecting more than was his due. Paris was a city of pleasure and he was asking this vivacious Parisian to forgo the untasted sweets of the gay life she saw around her for the known monotony of his companionship. As a lover he hardly touched the hero mark, however excellent a father or even a husband he might make. Wherever she went she heard the mockery of the middle aged: the posters flung it at her, the comic journals, the actors at the Revues—all sang the unbridled song of Youth! Youth! Youth! Marriage was a means by which the young girl escaped from her family restrictions. If there were none of these, why marry at all?

She could not flirt with Pourgot. He did not know how to make eyes, or whisper flatteries, or tenderly press her fingers. He could not even dance without making himself ridiculous. He was so used to her that he forgot to tell her twenty times a day that she was charming. Such inattention in the case of such a girl might well set all his plans agley.

The vision of Claire grown up intensified the sting of George's conscience. He realised that Ethel must be found. What must be done then depended on her state of mind and body. He did not love her, but he had a duty to her. The selfishness of these lost years must be retrieved.

The private inquiry agent whom he had engaged to search for Ethel had little enough to go upon. So many thousands of her kind are sacrificed each year to Moloch. Jean Defrain had seen her once—some years ago—like himself, the worse for drink; he had heard she danced at a *cabaret* on the *quais*.

George shuddered.

From one to another he wandered, till he knew Paris as only the police can know it. Courage failed him when he came to that particular hell which had been the scene of his first adventure, so he left it to the last. But in the end he went there too.

Seven years had passed, and yet it might have been seven days.

The same half-lit, half-empty hall.

One of the dancers came and sat beside him.

"Beer?" said the waiter.

He nodded, and the waiter brought two glasses.

As in a dream, he heard the same rough cockney accent that he heard seven years ago.

"English, ain't you?"

She still coughed whenever she spoke.

She had the same peroxide hair, the same skin rather more corroded. The eyes were still more bleared. They had forgotten him.

"Get me out of here, there's a friend. They've stolen my money. I want my fare back to London."

It was the same old trap.

The waiter hovered nearer.

"Buy me a cigarette."

George nodded.

"Give me the money, quick."

They still charged five francs for the cigarettes.

"Pay it," she whispered over her glass. "Better that than be knifed."

He paid, and again the waiter disappeared.

Mechanically the words came to his mouth.

"What sort of place is this?"

"White slavers," she replied. "Can't you help me out?"

George looked her in the face.

"You asked me to do that seven years ago. I gave you forty francs."

"You did, did you? More fool you." She laughed her coarse rough laugh. "Been here before, and come again? Well, I'm damned! Here, Jim," she beckoned to the waiter. "Another beer. This is my drink, old boy."

But George slipped out.

Whew!

He had been a fool.

Was Ethel worth as little pity?

"Perhaps she went back to London," said the inquiry agent. "We have connexions there."

The search went on in London, but George remained in Paris.

He worked all day. At night he went from one haunt to another.

Paris is surely inexhaustible.

If he did not come upon a trace of Ethel, he stumbled once or twice upon her husband, Wolseley Greville. Not once alone, but twice or thrice he saw the hateful face—each time more devilish—at *cabarets* of more than doubtful repu-

tation. The face was unmistakable, and still more unmistakable the limp. At each place Wolseley Greville seemed to move as one in authority. Yet his name did not appear in such as ventured on a programme.

Most clearly he had business here in Paris.

Ah! Perhaps that accounted for the absence of Ethel. She knew that he was here, and was evading him.

But if Greville had his business, what was that business? What had been his life these last seven years? And what had been the end of those proceedings for divorce?

The inquiry agent was put upon the scent.

Within a week a telegram came from London that Ethel had been seen. The letter that followed was non-committal, asked George to come over and make certain for himself of her identity, said that he need have no fear of Greville, indeed, that Scotland Yard was only waiting for the proper moment to put that unsavoury person where he ought to be.

George remembered the incident of Greville in that haunt of bullies, the restaurant in Soho. He thought he understood.

And now for Ethel.

London was calling, and George answered to the call.

CHAPTER XLIII

A DANGEROUS GAME

WHEN Wolseley Greville received a note from Jacobs & Jacobs, his solicitors, curtly informing him that they declined to go on with his case against his wife, he had the shock of his life. Lawyers, according to his notion, would do anything they were paid to do; and as he had been prudent enough to confide to them nothing of his schemes for compromising with the co-respondents, he was stunned by this unexpected blow.

At once he suspected them of having designs on his own purse and reputation, for by this time he was unable to impute to any one a loftier motive than he himself possessed. Had he been a lawyer with such a client as himself he would have reaped a harvest both out of the plaintiff and also out of the defence.

After due reflection he resolved to play Brer Rabbit and be polite to such powerful enemies. Jacobs & Jacobs refused to give him any reasons for their conduct, or to deliver any documents containing information they had acquired on his behalf. Whatever they had learned they held for themselves.

Still, they made no threats, and after a few weeks of abject fear Greville began to breathe again.

In the meanwhile Ethel had fled, and he had at least no visible wife to interfere with further plans. He could forgive her virtue while she had money to invest for him, but when he had sucked her dry her place was certainly the street.

Ethel must be penniless, but Greville had in his theatre a going concern which procured him certain profits and still more certain pleasures. Musical comedy with such a

chorus as he commanded was Pied Piper to the sons of luxury. The bread that he would cast upon the waters returned at times in tides of huge percentage. Suppose a chorus girl retired to virtuous marriage with a peer. What orgies of blackmail!

It was a dangerous game, but Greville was a skilful player. It mattered little that in time his private reputation stank. He had money and success.

At last he met his match in the redoubtable Cissy Malone, afterwards Lady Chesterly. That estimable peeress had been trained in a hard school, fighting her way through poverty at first with virtue and economy, then with the flush of easier morals. Greville for the most part liked to catch his nestlings young. The future Lady Chesterly was an adept at concealing her age. She was a born comedian and sang sufficiently in tune to suit his public. She was exceptionally pretty, and though for a time she affected to misunderstand his terms, that was only her way of making bargains.

When at last she had her peer entangled, the *mésalliance* caused the usual tremendous flutter.

The new Lady Chesterly was in her element. No one else dared to display such magnificence, and no one kept the tradesmen waiting longer for their money. She kept a grip of steel on her infatuated husband, diverting his expensive tastes so far as possible into her own pocket. What he bought for her was an investment. She trampled on the menials who expected perquisites, and the second-hand dealers who thronged to her back doors. The House of Chesterly was more magnificent than ever, but it was put upon a sound financial footing.

During her brief career at Greville's theatre she had scented out its secrets, an unsavoury mess. When, therefore, that jewel, Greville, tried his old game on her, he received another shock. Diamond cut diamond with a vengeance! It was he that was blackmailed.

Just about this time the luck of his theatre began to change. After many years of careless fortune, two pieces

in succession were put on, so imbecile that even the bevy of beauties failed to draw. Greville saw trouble ahead and knew that once his debts were known the sycophants would fly.

He crossed more frequently to Paris, ostensibly to pick up talent for the company.

In Paris, London always seemed less threatening. The Channel rolled between him and his creditors—and Lady Chesterly. There, taking courage, he plunged, on a still larger scale than he had dared before, into a dangerous but profitable business in which for some time he had already had a share: a group of *cabarets* so sinister in reputation that no wise man went to them with money that he meant to bring away.

Where did all the girls come from? Surely some were drugged, thought the police spies, but were unable to show proof.

If the girls had talent they appeared in time at Greville's theatre in London. If they had none, they vanished, occasionally to be found at St. Lazare.

Deep in this traffic of fair virgins, Wolseley Greville searched round carefully for likely victims, and just about the time that George returned to Paris, came upon the operatic class attended by Claire and her friend Leonore. Clear young voices, pretty faces, Parisian style. Some of them would just do for his chorus; it just depended upon their being adaptable.

Leonore was the first he got acquainted with, and Leonore, who saw some money in the business for herself, introduced him quite discreetly—he was not an attractive man to look upon—to such of her friends as were not too particular, or were ingeniously blind, or could be trusted to forgive his face because of the prospects that he promised.

Of the last-named Claire was one. She was ambition daintily incarnate. Her lovely voice, her sprightly manner, her insouciant charm should draw all London. So thought she, and so said he. Then too, as he found out, she was a foundling, half a model, lived alone with an artist—pouf!

she must be what he wanted her to be. Of course he never dreamed she was his own flesh and blood.

Yet Claire was not so unsophisticated or so unfettered as he fancied. She had been warned of the under-world by faithful Mother Labori, there were few of the latest books she did not read, and the eloquence of Leonore could not at once persuade her that a man who looked so like a devil could be quite disinterested.

And in her own wild way, she loved her guardian, wept to think she must part from him if she went to London and so must lose her only friend—she knew quite well that Leonore was just a parasite—must leave the dear old Studio, and never again perhaps revisit the Forest farm in summer, and Paris! Could she not seek fame in Paris, and so escape the need to cross that dreadful Channel?

By accident she found that Greville had the management of theatres in Paris also. Would he not try her first at one of these? London was such a long way off.

Leonore suggested yes, but Greville knew it was too dangerous for him. English girls for the Paris houses, French for London. He did not want his victims to be too near home.

Besides, once she was inside any of his *cabarets*, she would most surely understand.

So he held out for London.

His drugs were just as potent there.

But first he had to promise Claire her price—the price of leaving her beloved studio and her dear Paris—five hundred francs a week, and she must travel with Leonore. Valérien Pourgot must not know. He was her guardian, and might have the right to stop her.

In order to blind her Maestro to the projected flight, she had to pretend to have given up her waywardness. She posed without complaining. She kept good hours. She sang his favourite songs. Never was Pourgot so happy.

Meanwhile she was packing secretly, planning the great adventure. Leonore was to be her companion, Greville at a reasonable distance.

She was to go to Cook's, and there conspicuously buy a ticket for St. Petersburg. Pourgot when he discovered she was absent would of course think of London and would rush to Cook's, who would remember her and put him on the wrong scent.

She would need at least a week's rehearsal, and no one must be allowed to interfere. Then when she had made her *début*, and all London was at her feet, she would send him a triumphant telegram, and summon him to do her homage. Of course he would come. He would paint a new picture of her. She would have a poster made of it. She would come back to Paris with a splendid motor-car; her hats would set the fashion; all the girls at the class would tear their eyes out with envy. Oh, she would be so condescending?

Of course she would have a king in love with her, and she would have zebras or antelopes as well as the motor-car.

Such were her dreams.

Yet in her bosom, on the night she left the studio, she carried, and very often felt to see that it was easy to get hold of, a revolver ready loaded.

That morning she had received the ultimatum. Greville had grown tired of her procrastinations. And so he wrote:

"To-night, or not at all. I shall expect you at the Gare du Nord at nine o'clock. Here are five hundred francs, your first week's salary.

"W. G."

During the day, Claire made her last slow preparations. Leonore was to join her at the station. She had a thousand francs of her own, laid by from Pourgot's generosity. At the time appointed she was at the Gare du Nord.

Leonore was there. Greville slipped into their carriage at the last moment. Everything was perfectly arranged.

The train swung out into the night.

Claire, bubbling over with excitement, chattered without ceasing—a bird escaped from its cage.

Leonore was more silent.

The swaying and the rumble of the train at last had their effect. Claire also quieted. She was tired, almost dejected.

When they were still an hour from Calais, Greville suggested supper. He had brought a basket, full of sandwiches, cold chicken and wine.

"Before the sea-voyage?"

"Why not? It is always safest so. Any old traveller will tell you."

Claire had no appetite. The motion of the train affected her.

And the wine—horrible!

Yet Leonore forced it on her.

It was not till she had emptied her glass, and her head began to swim, that she remembered one of the white slave stories she had read, and suspected.

When her two companions gripped each arm, and half-carried her on board into her cabin, she still had sense enough to watch them.

This must have been no ordinary wine.

Her limbs were heavy as lead. She could hardly keep her eyelids from closing.

In the cabin Claire felt Leonore take her purse from her, and watched her strip her jewel box.

Leonore and Greville were in league. He came into the cabin, and they laughed together as they pointed at her.

"Where is her contract?" he asked. "We can't let her keep that."

Leonore did not take long to find it.

Claire tried to lift her hand up to her bosom.

Impossible.

The wine must have been drugged.

There as she lay, before her senses had quite ebbed away from her, Claire realised at last what Wolseley Greville really was.

He had lured her to a foreign land away from those who would protect her, and had her at his mercy.

CHAPTER XLIV

AT BAY

IN planning the ruin of Claire, Wolseley Greville had made one fatal miscalculation—he had omitted to allow for the storm which kept them seven dreadful hours upon the English Channel.

Hardly had they emerged from port when it swept upon them. The pounding of heavy seas and the violent pitch and toss of the ship rapidly prostrated the passengers, and Greville, who had meant to bide his time in the smoking-room and was fortifying himself with brandies and sodas, was so completely overcome that he lay like a trampled worm upon the floor, groaning and retching in such abject misery that Claire, had she been able or of a mind to see him, might almost have felt pity for him.

Claire, however, was herself aroused from her drugged slumbers to the rude emotions of sea-sickness—fortunately for her, as this relieved her of much of the poison which was benumbing her. By the time the vessel had at last reached Dover Harbour she was once more in command of her senses, a little limp and dizzy, but not so miserably limp nor half so brain-racked as her two companions. Nature in their case had had full swing.

As she lay, recovering consciousness, gripping the sides of her berth to prevent herself from being thrown out on the floor, Claire formed her plan of escape. She felt she was too weak still from the effects of the drug to break away at once. Besides, she had lost her purse and her jewels. Leonore must first disgorge these, but Leonore at present was a complete and hopeless wreck, incapable of

anything except of being sick. Claire must therefore wait a little, feign still to be under the drug's influence, so that she could find where Leonore had hid the money. She might even have to let them bring her on to London. But there she could surely find an opportunity of getting even with them, or at least of giving them the slip.

She felt in her bosom. The revolver was still there. Thank God!

At last they were in smooth water. The stewards, who themselves had most of them succumbed to the unusual stress, reappeared among the bedraggled passengers and helped them to their feet and overcoats. Sympathetic porters from the shore supported to the waiting train the tottering steps of those who needed them. Customs, formalities were waived, and Claire found herself propped up in the corner of a first-class carriage, her eyes half closed, facing the pale, dejected features of Wolseley Greville.

But where was Leonore?

Leonore on terra firma was still in the most violent pangs of her sea-sickness. The steward who had helped her off the ship suggested she should go to the hotel. She nodded assent, then fainted, to wake up with a blinding headache in a room of the *Lord Warden*.

Ill luck this for Claire, for Leonore had still possession of Claire's purse and jewels.

The whistle blew and, with the rain slashing upon the carriage windows, the train set off for Charing Cross.

Alarmed that they should be alone in the carriage, but still feigning semi-consciousness, Claire reviewed the situation. First of all she realised that England was still in the Middle Ages—this was a compartment, not a corridor carriage. It would be in vain for her to summon aid from other passengers; they could not help her if they would. Secondly, she had no money, thanks to Leonore. Thirdly, she was just as strong now as that blackguard opposite, still weak from his sea-sickness. Fourthly, she had her revolver. Perhaps he had one too.

As she studied his livid, dissipated face, she wondered

what mad infatuation had possessed her to trust herself to such a man. Through years of vice he had become a very devil in appearance, and when to this was added the effect of their stormy passage, he looked more like a vampire than a human being. Little indeed did she suspect that this was her own father. A revulsion of feeling in favour of Pourgot flooded her whole soul. What folly had possessed her to leave so good a friend! Now she would put her whole life at his disposition if ever she escaped from this ghastly trap.

As the train rolled on, Greville gradually pulled his scattered thoughts together. Where the devil was Leonore? What had become of the money and the jewels? How was he to get Claire unsuspected to his flat? How far was she still under the influence of that drug? Would she be able to put up a fight, make a scene? It was most devilish awkward. Perhaps it was as well there had been a storm. The railway porters would think her dazed appearance was the effect of sickness. Good God! What a passage! Where was that flask of brandy? Hell! Oh, there it was!

His throat burned with the gulp he took, but it whipped his heart up and he warmed again to life.

Life in his case meant further villainy. He felt in his pocket for the tiny bottle which he carried for such emergencies. It was the safest and most effective drug he knew.

Claire was a good-looking girl anyway, and it was just as well that Leonore was out of the way.

Rain still slashed upon the windows. It was a melancholy day.

There were blinds. He had better pull them down.

Claire felt that the time had come for action. They must still be half an hour from Charing Cross. He was looking at her in a way that surely meant her mischief.

She saw him rise and unsteadily shut out the light.

The carriage swayed at a curve in the track and he was overbalanced—fell back panting.

She herself thrilled with excitement. As she felt for

her weapon in her bosom she realised the furious beating of her heart.

He leaned across to put his hand upon her shoulder. Down she brushed it, and held him covered with her revolver.

"Don't! Don't!" He shrank back, holding his hands out and hiding his face in the cushion.

"Pull up the blinds," she said sharply. She was all nerves, and exultant.

He tried to rise, but his knees were knocking together and he fell back miserably in the corner, waving his hands and moaning:

"Don't! Don't!"

"My God!" she said. "What a cur!"

Wondering whether she should shoot or not, she saw the bottle sticking out of his waistcoat pocket. She had noticed his hand go there and feel something. This was evidently his weapon—no doubt another drug.

Snatching it from him, she opened the window, keeping him covered all the time, and threw it out on the track.

"That may save some other poor girl from your devilry," she said. "Now give me back my contract. I know you have it in your inside coat pocket. I saw you get it from Leonore."

He gave it up reluctantly, knowing that this was his last hold on her. Still it was that, or his own life. The little fury meant business this time and no mistake. Who the devil would have thought she would have carried a revolver?

"Now, remember," she said, as the train hurried through London's suburbs, "I have my revolver in my coat pocket here pointed at you. You let me out of the carriage first, without moving from your seat, and if you try to follow me from the station I shall shoot you without mercy."

All he could do was to sit back in his corner and grind his teeth with disappointed rage.

CHAPTER XLV

"DARK AND TRUE AND TENDER"

GEORGE in London learned the general history of Greville's later record, but at the moment did not hear of this last villainous attempt. He was on the track of Ethel, not of Claire.

It seemed, indeed, as if he had come on a false alarm. Ethel had disappeared again in the great whirlpool.

How different was the London that he came to from the London he had left. He was an established name now in the world of art, not fighting for a place among the portrait painters. The giants of the International were glad to welcome him—yet they were not friends. He understood at last that the only possible friends are the friends of youth.

"What is fame?" was the discussion one day at the luncheon table of the Chelsea Arts Club.

"Fame?" said Shanks, now an A.R.A. "Fame is reached when you get a prepaid telegram from the *Daily Mail*, asking for your opinion on some problem of the day. Don't you think so, Grange?"

"Fame is reached," said George, "when you are a middle-aged machine for painting celebrated pictures."

Sometimes indeed George warmed a little to a brother Scot. The familiar Northern accent brought back to his memory that wonderful half-year he had spent with Reid, and the old walks, and the east winds, and the granite pavements, which after all he loved. Blackguard that place as he might, Aberdeen was still very dear to his hidden heart.

How imperishable is the impress made by the world on

youth! The flush of adolescence passes, and we grow hard and old. Bitter in our disillusionment, we come at last back to our land of childhood, terrible perhaps with Ogres, but still a magic place and Wonderland. The streets we trod at four years old are peopled with our dream-friends. The dream may be forgotten or obscure, but still the friendship lives, softening the faces of those who too have stepped the selfsame stones and known maybe the selfsame dreams.

Reid—why did Reid not answer his letters? George had written twice to tell him of the triumph of his picture—bought for the French Nation, hung in the Luxembourg.

Gossip casually gave the reason. Reid had died, just a day or two before George himself had returned to London.

Poor old Reid!

George's eyes filled with tears, and tears too filled his heart.

Then came a letter which had followed leisurely from Paris. It must have been the last that Reid had penned.

"DEAR GEORDIE,

"Here's a hand, my trusty friend, an' gie's a hand o' thine. Well done, sonny, well done! I knew ye had it in you. To hell with Royal portraits now! I say it that am no anarchist, but like old Samuel Johnson have no damned use for patrons. The world can come to you now—ye've got no call any more to lick the boots of a lord.

"I saw one of your paintings at Glasgow last year, and I knew ye would come into your own.

"Man, I wish ye were here to see the sunsets from my window—ye ken I'm bedridden whiles—the old complaint, rheumatic gout with a dash of sciatica and a sprinkling of pleurisy touched with pneumonia, not to mention the bronchitis that ye remember always took me when I got a chill on the liver. Ah, but it's the heartache that's the worst of all, the feeling that the beauty of the world's all slipping away—and will then heaven be half so fair?

"It's got to come, I suppose, and sure just now it would be some relief—a sleep that would not be an uneasy slum-

ber, quiet, serene, no more pain. Ah! but the beauty of the world is surely worth the pain—the tenderness of dawn, the blaze of day, the cool and luminous eve, then deep, blue night.

“Last night the doctor told me I had just a few weeks more to see it in. Man, I’m thinking he meant days—it’s just his way of putting it. Ye mind thon Browser that was a medical when ye were still at King’s, and had his collarbone broke? Well, he’s my executioner, God bless him.

“If it must come so soon, why should I sleep at all? There’s sleep enough to come. Prop up the pillows then, facing the slip of window. Watch the silver dusk shimmer and brighten into day. And then the flicker of sunlight—and, oh God! how wonderful it all is!

“I have always painted the light too grey.

“Ye can’t paint light too light, sonny.

“If I could only live my life again!

“Well, well, good-bye, and God be with you, for auld lang syne.

“NATHANIEL REID.”

CHAPTER XLVI

RESCUE

POOOR old Reid!

Thinking of his old Scots friend, George went back over the footsteps of his former life, and being on the lookout in any case for a place to paint, went to see the studio once occupied by Ravin.

It was to let. George had the boards of the floor taken up, removed the fungi, and rearranged the room to suit his own ideas.

Ravin would not have recognised his former den in this luxurious workshop. Indeed it was unique in Chelsea. A cork carpet of old-gold shade covered the floor, and the drab distemper was replaced by a cream silk-fibre paper. George was sick of the low in tone. Now he wanted light.

Ravin never reappeared, but at times George thought he recognised his tumble-down servant Peter slinking past at nights. Peter did not speak to him, so perhaps it was some one else.

Yet it was the very Peter who, with dog-like fidelity, was watching for the one man who had been kind to him, and had picked him from the gutter. George he hated as he hated every "toff," and so postponed his begging visit till every other source has failed.

One night the artist was returning to his studio somewhat late after a concert, to fetch a photograph of his Luxembourg picture. Some illustrated paper wanted it at once. He had forgotten to post it before he left, and wished to have it off his mind before he went home to the

rooms where he slept. As he entered the street, he heard a whistle from the further pavement.

"That you, gov'nor?" said the well-known voice, and Peter himself shuffled across. "Ain't forgot me, gov'nor? Got a match?"

The match was used to light the fag-end of a cigar which George remembered to have thrown away.

"Parley-voo fronsey?"

"Oui, oui," replied George with the utmost gravity.

"That's wot she said," mumbled Peter, scratching his head. Then he brightened up. "But she flung 'er arms round me neck, gov'nor. Gawd's truth, she did."

"Who did?"

"Wy, that Frenchey—wot I met in the Pawk. Said she wanted to meet you?"

"Very kind of her," replied George, wondering what it was all about.

"Oh, she's aw right. She's an abduction. Say, gov'nor, you're a toff, ain't you—got plenty money?"

"Why are you hard up?"

"Me? No freeborn British subjick, that's wot I am. But it's this Frenchy demmy-swell. You can 'elp 'er, gov'nor. She knows you!"

"Knows me?"

"Yes, true's luck! I meet 'er in the Pawk, a-sleepin' on my patch, *my* patch, an' me a freeborn British subjick. 'Git out,' says I, polite like. Well, she jab-jab-jabbered just like Moosoo Ravin. 'Parley-voo?' says I. 'We, we,' says she, same's you, but she flings 'er arms round me neck. Never so surprised in me life. Got another fag, gov'nor?"

The production of a whole cigar brought sunrise to his face. Peter bit it in half, pocketed the larger section for another day, and puffed at the remainder in silent bliss.

"Hurry up," said George. "I can't stand here all night."

"Well, as I was a-sayin', she jab-jab-jabbered. All I catch of wot she says is the words 'abduction' and 'artist.'"

'Artist be blowed,' says I. 'I ain't no artist. But I knows 'em, plenty of 'em. Ever 'eard of Moossoo Ravin?' No go. 'Ever 'eard of Mr. George Grange'—that's you, gov'nor. 'We, we,' says she, an' bobs 'er 'ead up an' down an' flings 'er arms round me neck again. Well, I guessed she meant it for you."

Who could it be? Not Ethel, she was not French. Was it some model he had used in Paris, now stranded in London?

"Where is she now?"

"In the studio," said Peter, shuffling.

"What!"

"That's wot I'm a-sayin'," answered Peter, as if warding off a blow. "In the studio, you bein' 'er friend. Good evenin', gov'nor. Adoo."

Before George could recover from his astonishment Peter was round the corner.

Here was a pretty situation! An unknown French girl in his studio at this time of night, who was in the habit of flinging her arms round people's necks, and who said she knew him.

The lamp was lit—old Peter knew his ground—but there was no sign of any inmate.

"A thief!" thought George, and wondered what she could find to steal.

Ah, there she was, lying on the floor in the recess in front of the fire, fast asleep. The fire was lit too. Poor girl, how tired she must have been! The recess was only part of the working room now, and in the whole of this the furniture comprised just one stool besides the easels and canvases and a cabinet of drawers in which he kept his sketches and papers.

Lighting a candle, he examined her face.

Claire!

But how pale!

It would be a shame to disturb her now, and he could not leave her alone. He would wait and watch.

It was two o'clock before she stirred. George had kept

himself awake by sketching her as she lay there by the fire. When she moved he accidentally knocked over his stool and she was wakened too. In a moment she had sprung to her feet and was facing him.

"Monsieur Grange, you remember me?" she said eagerly in French.

"I met you at the studio of Valérien Pourgot."

"I am his—yes, his daughter. You must wonder at this strange intrusion. I could not make that old man understand. I thought he went to fetch you, but I was so tired, I fell asleep. I have walked your streets two nights now and I am not used to it—I have run away."

"From your father?"

"Yes—no—yes—no——" She burst into tears.

"Confound it all," thought George, "this is going to be a nuisance."

After a few minutes she grew calm enough to speak.

"It was all through Monsieur Greville," she began.

"Greville?" he interrupted. "Wolseley Greville? Does he know you are here?"

He looked at her suspiciously.

"No—no, I am no friend of his. Oh, how I hate him. He is my enemy. He tried to—he is—oh, I could kill him! I did try," she added, suddenly laughing. "Look!"

She took out a revolver from her bosom.

"He was a coward," she said.

"I still don't understand," said George. "But for the sake of old times, I will do anything you like."

"Old times?"

"Yes," he said. "I can never forget."

He went over to the cabinet and pulled out a drawer. From this he took a sheet of Michalet paper on which was a charcoal drawing.

"Why, yes," she said. "That was my pose at Colarossi's when Maestro first saw me. So you were there too?"

"Do you recollect one day in summer, seven years ago, when you were still a little girl, and Monsieur Pourgot was painting you in the Forest of Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, and a woman came and frightened me—a bad woman."

"She was your mother."

"My mother? I do not believe you. I had another mother."

"Yet it is true."

"Then who is my father?"

George was about to answer when suddenly a sickening thought choked him.

"Never mind these things," he said. "Enough that I know. I will help you because I knew your mother, and because I respect Monsieur Pourgot."

She bowed.

"I will tell you my story," she said. "I was very cruel to Maestro, very wilful, and I believed that this villainous Monsieur Greville had obtained for me a position in an English theatre. So I ran away from Maestro and crossed with Monsieur Greville in the boat. Then—on the steamer—and in the train—I understood what he really wanted, but——"

She smiled significantly at the weapon.

"At Charing Cross I escaped from him. I could not telegraph to Maestro. I had no money; and, even if I had, I would have been afraid he would never forgive me, and I am proud. So I walked and walked and starved till that old man gave me a crust of bread and brought me here. That is all."

George sighed with relief.

"Then that is easily mended," he said. "But it is late now. You cannot go to an hotel. My studio here is still at your service, though it is hardly fit for you. I sleep elsewhere. There is no bed, but we can rig up something, and to-morrow we can set it all right. Trust to me."

Then stepping across the room,

"Here is a kind of bed that I myself have used when I wanted to start work early."

He took down a six-foot canvas that was leaning face

to the wall and laid it upwards on the floor, making a pillow of his overcoat.

"But it is a painting," she said. "Did you sleep on that?"

"Not this one," he said, "but it is all the same. The paint is dry and the picture is one which I shall never sell. Now, I shall write a note which will explain everything to the caretaker in case she should come in. Till to-morrow then. Good night."

"Ah, Monsieur Grange, you are so good. Au revoir."

Sleep was utterly routed by such an experience. George again found himself pacing alone at night along the Embankment as he had paced it once before.

How curious the coincidence, and yet how different! Ethel had driven him out on that sleepless night, and now after many years, it was her child. That child had come unasked at midnight to the very same studio in Chelsea as the mother had done—say sixteen years before—true, on a different errand, and to beg the hospitality of another painter. Was this life simply an arabesque of circles, twining and intertwining on the walls of Kismet?

Was Ethel dead? If so, her spirit still might haunt that staircase, stepping down from the gallery to the studio below. Perhaps it was her spirit that had guided the footsteps of her child to a safe hermitage. No, not a spirit exactly, but the very earthly, very muddy Peter, who knew the trick of the latch. The earthly string of accidents was all so naturally connected that no spiritual guidance was required; yet surely there was an echo of these accidents in heaven.

Poor Ethel! What if it had been she who had come for refuge, not her daughter. Would he have given it without question, obliterating the terrible suspicion of the last years, or would he have been a cruel judge?

Not a judge, good God! Who was he to set himself above all other men, above a woman, remembering his own complicity in the casual life? Not a judge, though the bond between them was for ever broken. Surely he could

have given her refuge for a night, and just as now he would be pacing the Embankment.

Fate, at any rate, had done this—it had given him the chance to make some small amends for the wrong he might have done to Ethel. If he had given the mother a lift along the downward path, he was now helping up the daughter. She looked upon him almost as her saviour.

If Ethel knew, would this not make her happy?

As for Claire, neither could she sleep, at least at first. She was too excited at her relief from the terror of the last few days. Then, as she prepared to settle down, she realised the curious nature of the bed that George had suggested.

Pushing the canvas to the light, she examined the painting. It seemed to be a picture that she knew. Yes, it recalled that picture by Titian of which Maestro had a reproduction—the *Sacred and Profane Love*—only it was different, modern.

“How beautiful the model must have been,” she thought. “It would be a shame to sleep upon it.”

And so when George came in at eight o'clock next morning, he found Claire still asleep upon the floor.

CHAPTER XLVII

FORGIVEN

DO you mean to say you came over from Paris with no money?" George asked, as they sat at breakfast.

"Oh no, I had more than one thousand five hundred francs, but that infamous monster Leonore stole my purse and jewels so that Mr. Greville should have a hold on me."

"Well, I think we'd better wire to Monsieur Pourgot to fetch you back. He would come, wouldn't he?"

Claire shook her head.

"Not even if you asked?"

Her blush settled the telegram. Pourgot on his side did not wait. At eight o'clock that evening a hansom drove up to the door with the excited Maestro, slippered and hatless and radiant.

"Escaped from Waterloo, and still running," said cabby to a brother of the whip. "Three cheers for froggy! Hooray!"

What a meeting that was! Kisses, tears and kisses again. Poor George began to feel a little out of it. At last he edged in with the suggestion that Monsieur Pourgot was probably hungry.

"Now I think of it," said the latter, "I am. Nothing to eat since yesterday. Let us eat a young baby in your English fashion."

They all laughed, Claire still more when she realised Maestro's appetite. From her recent experience in crossing the Channel, she knew the symptoms. The restaurant waiter stood at gaze before a customer who demolished a dozen dishes of *hors-d'œuvre* at one fell swoop. Still more

so when the same customer took two helpings each of every course, and monopolised the fruit in the establishment. The coffee was drunk in the presence of the proprietor, his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, and half a dozen neighbours who came to look on. Claire and George maliciously asked questions about the Cannibal Islands.

At last the great little man sighed and lay back in his chair, puffing a huge cigar.

"After all, I like London," he said. "We came from the station like a racehorse and did not kill anybody. Amazing!"

"That's nothing," said George. "If only you will be my guest for a week or two, I will show you the most wonderful city in the world, for colour, for life, for interest."

"But you have no room," said Claire.

"We'll find a room somewhere," said George. "Only on one condition, that Monsieur Pourgot is my guest."

After a mild protest, Pourgot consented. Rooms were engaged at a neighbouring hotel, and George parted from his friends on the understanding that they should all go sight-seeing together for a week.

Those were happy days for Claire. Maestro had forgiven her. Maestro loved her just the same as before, and she—well she——

London can be so beautiful when the sun shines, and, as it happened, those were jolly days and sunny and clear in spite of February winds. Claire went about half afraid that she would meet Wolseley Greville, half glad that she would face him on the arm of Maestro.

George was fascinated in the task of disentangling the memory of Ethel from Claire's unconscious manner. Claire was dark and so much more French. She must have carried on the features of her grandfather. And yet there were many points of touch—voice inflections, the lift of her chin when she asked a question, the inclination of her head when she was listening. When she walked, her figure was bent slightly forward, just like Ethel's. In character too there was a likeness. Claire was a child of pleasure, just

as Ethel had been, with the difference that Claire had never been thwarted. She too hated to be alone, but long years of petting made her not sacrifice herself for friends but demand the right of some one's attendance. She too had her religious mood, but her knowledge of music made her more discriminate. When George took her to a service of plain song, she was in raptures. It was of course natural with Pourgot's training, that she should be fond of pictures, but this too might have been a bond inherited.

Poor Ethel! What had become of her now? Perhaps she was in the gutter, perhaps in unhappy splendour. Death perhaps had laid cool hand on that hot heart. Better if it were so. How terrible for Claire if she should ever meet her mother, and know her father! George had told Pourgot of his slip of the tongue, and they were forced to throw barricades across her curiosity. Gaieties distracted her most easily, and the week slipped into a fortnight, the fortnight into a month.

Almost every night and many afternoons they went to concerts, Claire and Pourgot delighted to find that London could command such music. When they knew that George was Scotch, they were ravenous for Northern ballads. This opened up a new world for all three. George had hitherto been familiar only with the ordinary Scottish songs. Now he learned the exquisite Northern melodies that musical enthusiasts had in later days unearthed. When they came in tired from shopping or sight-seeing, Claire, who was learning English with the prettiest of accents, would sing *Turn Ye to Me* or *Colin's Cattle* or *Lady Anne Bothwell's Lullaby* so sweetly that her accent only added charm. If Mary Stuart had only had such songs to sing instead of the ballads of Provence, and sung them in such a way, she could have won the heart of the dourest Highland Chief, for ever and for ever.

Shopping was a pleasure that grew. George had told Pourgot that for the sake of her mother and old times he wished to let Claire have her will, just for this holiday—he would pay the piper. He certainly had the money, for his

pictures now commanded big prices, and his expenses were small. The men and women of Society whom he casually met again thought he was down in the world because he no longer painted portraits for the Academy, and therefore spared him the cost of their company.

Fortunately for George's purse, Claire decided that it suited her rôle of penitent to affect an interesting ill-health. She said she was tired after an hour of Bond Street, and as she never made decisions under forty minutes, and preferred artistic pewter to a necklace of pearls, the total barely reached three figures. Needless to say, she was delighted with such a cavalier as George, and had he cared to play the flirt Pourgot might have gone back to Paris as Anglophobe as ever.

George had left them to themselves one afternoon, and was sipping tea at the Club when a painter whom he much respected entered the room.

"Ah, tea and buttered toast!" said the latter. "Excellent idea. Permit me to join you."

"Are you in town again?" said George. "I thought you had retired for ever to the country."

"So I have, but I am come to market with my annual cow. Also to look about me. By the way, I saw you yesterday with an exceedingly pretty girl on your arm. May I congratulate you?"

"No, no," said George. "I'm not a marrying man."

"No cows for you, eh?"

"I don't quite catch what you mean."

"Oh, it's just my way of putting it—the little joke between my wife and myself. You see the only kind of picture that I ever sell must have some cattle in it——"

"Do you mean to say that those others—that Woman in Twilight and the Fishermen——"

"Done for my own pleasure, and of course my best, but a married man must think of other things as well. Fortunately we have no children, otherwise I should paint nothing but cows all my life. Again let me congratulate you."

CHAPTER XLVIII

A CORNER IN SOHO

THREE girls from the neighbouring laundry, very dark, very voluble and very French, all the neater because they wore no hats, tripped along the narrow street. A barrel-organ broke out round the corner, and the middle girl was still dancing when they passed out of sight. The distance was dotted at intervals with incandescent lamps, evidently meant to light up the pavements, but revealing only as much of the flagstones as philosophers reveal of the human heart.

Ten paces from the brightest of these luminous futilities was the entrance to a restaurant. A screen shut off the lower part of the window, but there were no blinds. On the one side were private houses, on the other, in the direction of a larger thoroughfare, were shops—an *épicerie*, a news-agent, and a tobacconist.

Soho has many restaurants, each with its peculiar smells, customers and waiters, but this one was peculiarly peculiar, for it displayed no bill of fare. Perhaps it was but a coffee-house? Yes, that was it—the lettering inside the door was Arabic.

The customers seemed mostly to be men, although at times a vision, composed of a waist, of flounces, and of vermilion lips swept over the threshold. Men would loiter near the entrance for two or three minutes, apparently in the profoundest meditation; then, as they sauntered near, would suddenly step inside. On the other hand, those who came out showed no such hesitation. It seemed almost as if they did not care to be connected with the

place, for hats were pressed on eyes and coats were muffled over chins.

At one moment indeed this entrance lost its rather quarantined appearance. Round the corner, where the barrel organ had been so gay, came the sound of voices, raucous, but evidently those of women, as if in altercation. Then up the street sped the harbingers of the police, little street boys running swiftly. The man in blue appeared, no, two of him, each tightly grasping the wrist of an indignant beauty. It was not at the officers that this fury was directed. Beauty had nails for other faces, jealous faces, faces thick with powder, for two fair daughters of Aphrodite had come to loggerheads in defiance of law and order. A crowd of interested neighbours hung on the ridiculously high heels of the captives, laughing and egging on the abuse so piquantly delivered.

It was but natural that the coffee-sippers should curiously throng the door. The women paused for a moment from their fury as they passed, and shouted out their explanations. The heavy Frenchman in front shrugged his shoulders and pulled out his empty pockets.

"Come along!" said one of the policemen firmly, and the procession of abuse proceeded.

The crowd had passed, but the heavy Frenchman waited at the entrance as if in doubt. Another joined him, presumably the *patron*, for he wore a sort of Turkish dress.

"What was it?"

"Blanche and Marie fighting again," growled the heavy man. "Want me to go bail for them. Curse women!"

"Better come in," said the other. "It's cold."

The two figures disappeared.

Again the street was desolate, then again a passer-by. This was a man who wore a wide-awake hat and an overcoat trimmed with astrachan. He covered the ground at a good pace, in spite of an unmistakable limp. Unlike the most of those who had preceded him, he plunged straight into the coffee-house.

Hardly had he disappeared when another figure came round from the same corner, almost running. This time it was a woman. She hurried on with her head forward, peering up the street, and seemed surprised that no one was in front of her. The light from the restaurant caught her eye—then she looked back at the dingy shops. Some doubt seemed to fetter her, for she went back and forward. At last she crossed the street and stood within the shadow of a deep portal.

Again the street was silent, again the lamps pricked the black space between the houses. The shops were shut, and only the light of the restaurant remained.

Then at last a policeman. The watcher pulled her gloves, as if she were just leaving the house that sheltered her. As she did so, something gleaming fell to the ground. With a stifled cry she picked this up and pushed it into her muff. The officer, however, did not notice her, walking with grotesque swagger into the mysterious entrance.

It was as when one pokes a stick into an ant heap. Within two minutes a swarm of men had stepped into the street, half walking, half running round the corner.

The watcher never stirred.

Again the officer appeared, this time with the heavy man, who counted as he walked some money in his hand. No doubt this was the bail for Marie and for Blanche.

Ten minutes more.

Then at the same moment two figures came into the street, one out of the restaurant, the other from round the corner. It was the former that the watcher saw. He was the man with the astrachan coat. He stepped out quickly, but still limping, up the street.

"At last!" the watcher whispered.

She had followed him as far as the first lamp-post, and had commenced to run, when suddenly she found herself caught round the waist.

"Not so fast, fair lady of the peroxide hair," said a drawling, tantalising voice underneath a dark moustache. "There are other pebbles on the beach."

"Let me go," she panted, struggling to escape. "Let me go!"

"Nay, nay. It is for thee, for thee, my beauteous fair, that thy Philostrate's heart is breaking."

"You cursed fool!"

Her eyes were straining after the retreating figure. Then she turned on her tormentor, snatching something from her muff.

"Let me go, or I'll knife you!"

Her arm was up to strike and the something gleamed again.

Philostrate fled at the rate of ten yards a second.

Sobbing with vexation at the delay, the woman hurried on in pursuit of her first quarry, but the street once more was desolate and nothing could be seen in the impenetrable darkness.

CHAPTER XLIX

IN THE PROMENADE

ALTHOUGH Pourgot quickly reconciled himself to England and declared to George that he had entirely misjudged an admirable nation, he could not conceal his nervous fear lest Greville should again disturb the atmosphere of happiness. Too well he remembered Claire's short previous repentance and how she had deceived him. It was impossible to tell from her present attitude of hate how much influence that blackguard really had upon her, and his hints that it was time for them to return to Paris grew more insistent every day. The young minx, however, knew that she was having a good time, and put off the journey time and again on the plea that she did not feel quite well enough to travel.

One evening, however, the headache was not feigned and the two men went out alone. George had discovered that the balcony of one of the better music halls enabled one to see in the ballet the loveliest play of colour, thrown out by the lighting from the wings. Various colours were thrown upon the dancers and, to an onlooker from the side seats close to the proscenium, the interplay of light and shadow as the figures moved across the floor suggested Fairyland. Under a green light they were violet shadows, and so on—always complementary.

The colour, the rhythm and the movement of the ballet have a special charm for the artist, never more so than at this particular hall. For here the sense is tickled by no gaudy glitter, but by tender harmonies and delicate suggestions.

"Marvellous, marvellous!" Pourgot kept saying.

The ballet ended and Pourgot was memorising this kaleidoscope, when he noticed his companion start. Following his look, he saw a woman leaning on the railing of the promenade, over-rouged, over-dressed, repulsive.

"You know her?"

George turned, his heart throbbing. It was Ethel.

"I think so," he said. Gripping Pourgot's wrist, he continued. "You also are concerned. Do you know who that woman is? It is the mother of Claire."

"Does she know of us?" said the Frenchman, turning pale. "I will leave for Paris to-morrow morning. Claire must not know. I will not give her up to any one."

"No fear of that."

"What are you going to do?"

"I must speak to her, if only for the sake of old times. Do you remember one day in the Forest of Fontainebleau, years ago, when you were painting? She came unexpectedly and frightened the child. I was with her then. She was—my model—at Marlotte. It was quite by chance that we came upon your picture. Poor Ethel—that is her name—was much affected, and went to Paris next day. I have never seen her since. But it is she."

"That the mother of my Claire!"

"I must speak to her. Come."

Pourgot followed in unwilling curiosity.

"Don't tell her," he whispered, "that Claire is in London. She might wish to see my darling, and that must not be."

They came up behind her and George tapped her on the arm. She turned round smiling, only to shudder when she recognised him.

"Get me a drink," she said, sinking into a seat. "Waiter, hurry up. This is an old friend."

How coarse her voice now, and how terrible the stamp of vice!

"Well, well," she continued. "Never thought I should ever see you again—least of all here."

"Why did you run away that day?"

"Don't let's talk of that. Here's to luck!"

She was already half tipsy, and the waiter nodded warning.

"Why did you leave me?" George repeated.

She steadied herself, gripping the seat.

"Why, to kill that blackguard, Wolseley, of course."

"And you failed?"

Ethel did not answer at first. She reached out a shaking hand, then drew it back.

"He's a devil!" she said hoarsely. "He always escapes me." Then, with a sudden change of mood, almost softly, "Where's the child now? She was a model, wasn't she?"

"She was the model of my friend here—Valérien Pourgot—don't you remember?"

"No," she said. "I can't keep faces now."

"My friend," said George, his voice trembling as he watched her, "came to London on a very sad errand. For many years he had taken care of this child as if she had been his own daughter. But somehow or other Claire got into bad company and was enticed away to England by Wolseley Greville, your husband, who did not know that she was his own child."

"My God!"

"Two days ago she was seen in Hyde Park sleeping on the grass, starving and alone."

Tears furrowed her cheeks.

"Starving!" was all she said.

This was more than the maudlin drunkenness. The news had touched her heart. As George refilled her glass she stopped him.

"If only I had not been a coward," she muttered.

The corner in which they sat was away from the light.

"It's my story over again," she said. "At least she can never be worse than I have been. I have been twice in prison—ugh! that St. Lazare—hospital, street and prison—a holy circle."

"Shall we tell her?" whispered Pourgot.

George shook his head.

Just then some one passed them on his way to the bar. He wore a wide awake hat and astrachan coat. Ethel pulled George's sleeve.

"It's him!"

Wolseley Greville was unconscious that he was watched. All three kept silence, looking. He tossed off a drink, quarrelled with a barmaid over the price and limped off to the exit.

"I've got him this time," said Ethel fiercely, and hurried after.

CHAPTER L

THE LAST DANCE

GREVILLE had stepped into a cab and driven off before Ethel reached the street. There was no other at the door, so that she had the mortification of seeing him disappear round the corner.

"Hullo, you after him too?" said a voice at her elbow.

Ethel turned to the speaker, another of the promenaders.

"If it's that fellow with a limp, yes! Curse him! He owes me a bit."

"He's that sort, is he? Thanks for the tip. No Covent Garden for me."

"Was he going to take you there?" said Ethel eagerly.

"We were to meet behind the orchestra at four. But if he's that sort, it's off."

"Get out," said the commissionaire. "No loitering."

Ethel did not wait for more. She hurried away to her tawdry lodgings to plan it all out, thoroughly sobered by her husband's latest infamy. The misery of her career had often been brought home to her; and, had it not been for this one settlement to make, she would long ago have killed herself. Now at last was the time for action.

She counted up her money. Just thirty-three shillings, for of late she had had bad luck, and the oily landlord had recently raised his rent. After buying a ticket for the ball, she would have twelve and six left, enough to get drunk on, anyhow.

It was two o'clock in the morning before Ethel arrived at Covent Garden, and the ball was in full swing. The revellers were making the most of it.

As she went along past the bars to the ladies' cloak-room,

a friend in pink skirts did the "splits" across the passage, greatly to the admiration of two fat hiccoughing Hebrews.

The air was thick with smoke, and her eyes smarted as she scanned the faces. No Greville yet. Perhaps he was dancing.

The scene inside the ball-room was familiar, and yet its colour seemed never to have been so beautiful. For a moment her bitterness died out and she could only feast her eyes upon the dresses and swaying figures, every motion of which seemed to express the joy of life. They were at the Grand Chain figure in the Lancers, and one set on the right showed such a happy note of vermilion in that harmony. The four ladies had evidently dressed to suit each other, for though each costume was different, each had the same red, set off by the same green. One gipsy had red shoes and a red blouse, another was a Spanish dancer with red kerchief, a third was dominoed in red, while the fourth was passionate with flowers. All danced with the quiet dreamy movement which showed them English. Beside them a garish crew of Germans made the contrast that set off self-restraint.

So crowded was the room that one could only see one's neighbours. After the stewards had cleared the floor, Ethel continued her search. There were a hundred different faces, but never the face of Greville. Except for a few solitary innocents in costume, the men were in ordinary evening dress and that limp could never be disguised.

At one moment she thought she saw him, but just then four noisy friends pounced upon her. She had to promise dances, and when at last she was free the man had gone. Still, four o'clock was the hour of the appointment. Perhaps he was coming late. Perhaps he was in the supper room. In the meantime she would dance, and then—and then——

When Ethel danced her partner had a lively time. She danced the barn dance that evening in a way that made the husbands send home post-haste such wives as remained.

The stewards inclined to interfere, but it was the last ball of the season. Then the music stopped for a moment; a pause, and then a rush for the position in front of the Judge's box.

It was the March Past.

Ethel retired behind the orchestra. She did not dance again, staring hazily at the men around her.

"Take care, dear, you're drinking too much," said a warning voice behind her. It was the girl who had done the "splits" downstairs.

"What time is it?" asked Ethel huskily of some one.

"Never mind," he returned. "We've lots of time yet. And we're taking you for breakfast."

She tried to rise, but sank back amid a shout of laughter.

"Better stay where you are, dear," said the voice in her ear.

She strove to collect her thoughts.

Four o'clock. It was the hour.

"A cup of strong coffee," she whispered to her friend. "I'm all right."

From that moment she would not speak. Gradually the crowd around her thinned till she was left alone. Minutes passed as hours, and still Wolseley never came. What if he did come? Would she be able to rise? Would he wait for her?

He *must* come. It was fate that he should meet her again, face to face.

What was that? Galop music! Then it must be the last dance.

He had not come.

With a fierce effort she pulled herself together and rose to her feet. She could walk still, though not very steadily, and carefully manœuvred through the jostle of men and women to the open hall. Yes, the last dance, and the floor alive with whirling figures. Ethel leaned against a pillar, miserable with disappointment. He was not anywhere. He never meant to come at all. Merely a blind to get rid of the girl that pestered him.

Faster and faster the music. Faster and faster the dancers.

Never before had there been such blaze, such swing, such life under that roof.

It was the last dance of the last ball of the best season on record.

Crash! The music wavered, the dancers slowed down—a shout of laughter, and they were at it again. Some one had let his partner down, and as the lady was fat no one was sorry.

Ethel stood on tiptoe to see why they laughed, but at first to no purpose. Then a clear space, and a red face struggling for breath.

It seared her. She herself must be like that soon.

No, never!

Three shillings left.

She hurled the silver among the dancers and laughed as the coins rolled out of sight.

She pushed to the centre of the floor, her hand pressed close to her breast. The hand was not empty, though the coins were gone. Dancers swept her aside, but only for a moment.

“Ha-ha! She would spoil their fun.

There, right in the centre.

A flash and a sparkle. As they huddled round her fallen figure, something dripped, dripped from her breast on to the floor.

CHAPTER LI

AN EPITAPH

GEORGE did not hear of Ethel's death till she was buried. He read of course in next day's evening papers of the sensational suicide at Covent Garden, but no names were given, and he had not associated the two unfortunate women.

Pourgot had been thoroughly frightened by the meeting, and sounded the bugle of return. He agreed, however, to spend one more day in London as Claire was not yet well enough to travel.

That night George invited them to dinner at Frascati's, making instinctively for the same table as that associated with Ravin's farewell. The band was playing Elgar's *Salut d'Amour* as they entered, a melody which captivated Claire, but which George by this time found a trifle hackneyed. He was particularly silent that evening, but Pourgot was so absorbed in Claire, and Claire was so absorbed in herself, that at first they did not notice.

George was more and more a fatalist. It seemed to him now natural that he should make friends only for a little, and that they should pass again out of his life. Other people were but stones flung into the surface of the slow-moving river of life, round whose brief entrance and exit rippled circles which in another moment passed into oblivion.

Such was life in relation to other men and women. But, ah, how different was the life of energy in work! Here there was no baffling circle, no drift of aimless current. Every day was a step of progress, new knowledge and new power acquired. Love and friendship might in vain hold out enticements. They were the life-illusion, necessary

only to keep the race alive. Mind was tied to matter by a fleshly bond, and so long as this earthly planet circled round the sun, and this sun was not absorbed in a still greater universe, so long would men and women dally with their amorous dreams.

But now he seemed to feel in himself a greater spirit, carried not in red blood but in white-hot nerves, tingling with a spiritual synthesis. It might be that his pictures would perish in a universal conflagration, but surely this urgency of intellect was a mood of some imperishable motion. He had at last caught the rhythm of everlasting life.

Thirty-six years old to-day, and he was just at the threshold of creation. The four pictures he had in continental National Galleries were but a foretaste of what he knew he could produce. Was not Titian greatest in his painting when he died of the plague at the age of ninety-nine? Was not that last picture, *The Crowning of Christ with Thorns*, the greatest of the great Venetian's masterpieces? Munich with all its artistic treasures held nothing more magnificent than this. It might be that some breath escaped from the spirit that had once moved the Venetian had floated down and taken flesh in his own body.

At last the other two noticed George's abstraction. Claire was the first to waken him.

"You think too hard, Monsieur Grange," she said, lifting his glass to his lips. "We are here on our last night, to amuse ourselves. But when you knit your brows and pucker up your forehead, you make yourself ugly. Now you are here as my cavalier, and I demand your smiles."

"I never knew that women wanted smiles," said George, smiling all the same at her over his glass. "I thought they were satisfied with pretty dresses."

"If you don't study women more," she replied, putting on the airs of a mother, "you will never find any one to marry you. If you proposed to any woman just now, she would be too frightened to say yes, however much she liked you. Women are afraid of tombstones."

"Claire!" protested Pourgot. "This is unkind."

"Not at all," said George. "I deserve it, and I like home-truths. But," turning again to Claire, "you must know me well enough now to know that I would rather be a tombstone than a husband."

"Then I shall write the inscription," she said. "Will this do?"

'Here Lies
George Grange, Scotchman,
Who died through not knowing that
He had a kind heart.
Possessed of many suits of clothes
He was always a Gentleman,
Never a Man.
His only perfect actions were his Pictures;
For these there is no tombstone.
Erected by his affectionate friend, Claire.'"

George laughed, but in his heart were tears.

Claire walked home with a dainty glove on his arm, the other glove on Pourgot's. She was delighted with herself. Never had she been so brilliant. This skill in epigram was a new discovery. She must cultivate it, must inaugurate a *salon*, and gather round herself brilliant men like George, on whom she could sharpen her wits still further. She was as proud as the day on which she had her hair up for the first time. Oh, she would have the world at her feet some day!

What a pleasant thing life was, with clever men to fetch and carry for beautiful women!

An open carriage rolled past them, in which sat a lady with a toy poodle in her lap.

"Oh, I must have a poodle, too," she cried. "I shall never be happy without a poodle."

"You shall have one," said George. "It will be a living token of my gratitude for your epitaph."

He was as good as his word, and Claire went back to Paris, Diana returning from the chase.

CHAPTER LII

DRAMATIC JUSTICE

GEORGE turned once more to work, painting steadily enough after a fashion, but never to his own content. Claire was the disturbing element. Her epitaph had rankled, and he wondered if he were worthy of any one's respect. She was so pretty too, and had it not been for the indelible past, she might—well, she might—And yet that was impossible. There was the memory of Ethel, and Claire seemed quite content with Pourgot.

A week after they had left he noticed in his paper that Greville had sold his theatre, but no more was stated than that it would be run on the old lines, by a syndicate.

When summer came George made up his mind to go North to Aberdeen and revisit his old haunts. Few would remember him now. George wanted to see with his now older eyes the work that had so much influenced his youth. Ah, and Balgownie could never be anything but beautiful.

He arrived on a Saturday night, putting up at an hotel in Union Terrace. This part of the town had greatly changed, and the tall new granite edifices certainly looked impressive. Reid's old lodging had been swept away in the improvements. Glancing at the papers, George saw that to-morrow was Communion Sunday, and that, owing to the number of communicants, there would be two services in the morning at Old Machar Cathedral.

"That remains, anyhow," he thought.

It was natural that he should walk over to the Old Town next morning. He had lost all belief in religion, but he must see the old cathedral again.

Many were on the same errand, but though he recognised a number of kent faces, none knew him; his hard, stern features retained so little that the casual observer could associate with the nervous stripling, a trifle round-shouldered, who had been a student seventeen years before.

And yet he did not pass altogether unrecognised. An old, tallish man with a stoop and grey whiskers stopped him.

"Are ye no Mr. George Grange?" he said.

"That is my name."

"I thought it would be you. I kent ye by yer likeness to yer mother's father, Dr. Jamieson. His Uncle William's wife was my grandfather's second cousin, so that you and me's connected like."

As he made this point, his eye brightened, the left side of his mouth curled up, and he plunged his forefinger into the air.

"Ye paint pictures, I'm thinkin'," continued this affable connexion.

"Yes, I'm an artist."

"I saw yer name in the *Free Press* last week among a list of distinguished *alumni* of the University who had not graduated."

"So the University claims me now, does it?"

"Aye, and they ca' ye 'distinguished' though ye niver took yer M.A. Still, ye might get yer LL.D. like, if ye were a fine painter, an' painted the picture of the year at the Royal Academy in London. Ye could ca' yerself Doctor then, though of course that's no so great as Professor. Still, ye couldna expect that. Ye see, ye niver took yer M.A."

So he blithered on. Then he got inquisitive.

"Ye'll be stoppin' wi' yer stepfather, like?"

"No, I'm at an hotel. But you must excuse me. I'll be late for the Cathedral service. Good-bye."

When he came to the gate of King's College George felt that he could not pass without having another look at

the old quadrangle. It was with the men that he had had no sympathy, not with those dear old stones. Ah, they were the same as ever, sleepy and weather-worn and sweet, with the lovely spider crown keeping its watch over the web of life beneath.

The nave of the cathedral was filled with those who had come to celebrate the Sacrament, but the aisles were mostly vacant. George was ushered to a pew on the left far up, where he commanded the whole interior. As the diapason of the organ blended with the voices of the congregation, he felt the spirit of brotherhood brooding over the place. The foundations of belief might perish, but so long as men might gather together under such a roof the Church must remain.

And yet he was alone.

As the collection bags went round he felt in his pocket. He had a shilling and a sovereign. Putting back the shilling, he hesitated. The old wheeze came back to his mind about the elder and the man who had put in too much by mistake. Would he get credit in heaven for more than the shilling? Would he get credit for anything? Nevertheless, when the bag came round he put in the sovereign.

"Damn the Recording Angel!" he said to himself.

As he came out after the first service he turned to the little strip behind the cathedral, where one could look over to Seaton. He lit a cigarette as he did so, to the horror of an old woman beside him.

"Man," she said, "do ye not know ye're foulin' the Lord's air on the Sabbath?"

The place was as peaceful as ever, marked here and there by gravestones, some against the wall. As he read over the inscriptions, he noticed that one grave was without stone or rail. The bed was covered with moss, and there were forget-me-nots and evergreen. His memory sped to that day eighteen years ago, when he had stood there with Reid. Could that be Reid's grave?

Some one else was looking at the grave, a thick-set,

heavy-browed man who—yes, who must be Browser. Although they had never spoken to each other before, they remembered each other's faces, and fell into conversation.

"Do you know whose grave this is?" asked George.

"That was a patient of mine, before I got my appointment. Reid was his name—an artist. Careless of his health. Caught a chill and died. Curious grave, isn't it? Asked me to arrange it for him like this. Are you walking back?"

They stepped along together, and George learned among other things that Browser was now Professor of Anatomy at a Midland University. He had kept up his connexion with Aberdeen, and was doing some special research with one of the Professors here at Marischal College. Then they got on to old times.

"I remember the football match in which you broke your collar-bone," said George.

"Ah, yes, that was the turning point in my life. Gave up fooling about and set to work. What a change!"

"Do you remember Wolseley Greville? I saw him in London two months ago."

"Did you?" said Browser, slowing down and staring at George. "Ah, that is possible."

"How, why, have you heard anything of him since then?"

"Yes, that is to say, a little. Tell me where you saw him."

George briefly described the passing glimpse in the music hall.

"That must have been before the trouble with the police. He changed his name and went on tour with some provincial company, merely as an actor with a small part. Not that he could act, but he must have had some hold over the manager. Played in town halls and that sort of place, not regular theatres. Company was at Laurencekirk when the trouble began. Must have been rather pathetic. Manager absconded with the receipts, and the company was

left stranded. Greville had come to the end of his resources and thought he might find some of his old friends in Aberdeen. Had no money to pay his train fare, so started to tramp it. A man in active health could have done it with ease, but you know the life that Greville led. Must have slept several nights in the wet. When at last he reached Aberdeen he was so exhausted by exposure and privation that he went mad, and died next day in the workhouse infirmary. He had tried to blackmail me when I got my appointment, so I put detectives on him. They told me the story."

"So he is dead!" exclaimed George. "Well, I can't say I am sorry. He was such a blackguard."

Browser did not respond. They had passed up the Gallowgate, stopping for a moment at George's wish to look in at Macgillivray's Court, where he and Adam Grant had once read the *Alcestis* together.

"Better take care," said Browser. "There's an epidemic of typhoid fever here just now."

At last they reached Marischal College.

"Come in," said Browser. "I have the run of the place. I want to show you something."

Browser pointed out the extensions that had recently been made, and then they walked to where he was working.

"You don't mind the smell, I hope. You were at King's yourself, weren't you?" he said, as they went in.

"Yes," said George, "but of course an artist always has to learn anatomy. I know my Arthur Thomson off by heart."

They turned to a small room, of which Browser had the key, heavy with odour. In it were tables on which could be seen the outlines of three bodies covered with cloths.

"All in the interests of science," said the medical, taking off his coat and hat and fetching a case with an array of knives.

"Just wait till I wash my hands," he said. "Won't be a minute. You can smoke."

The odour of mortality is not pleasant.

Browser carefully dried his hands and drew back the cloth from the centre figure.

"Look here," he said, "this is the one I'm working on."

"Wolseley Greville! Good God!"

"Yes, we get our bodies from the workhouse. Curious that one who so degraded his University should come to lie on its dissecting tables. The only occasion on which his presence has been of service. A most interesting body."

THE END

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